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THUNDER WORLD

by **Edmond Hamilton**



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JULY 1956

Imaginative Tales

ALL STORIES
NEW AND
COMPLETE

William L. Hamling
Editor

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Front cover painting by Lloyd Rognan, illustrating a scene from "Thunder World."

Published bi-monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler Avenue Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all communications to IMAGINATIVE TALES, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. We do not accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work; submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements, and will be paid for at our current rates. The names of all characters used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidental. Copyright 1956 Greenleaf Publishing Company. Subscription rate \$3.00 12 issues. Advertising rates sent upon request. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corp., Sandusky, Ohio, Volume 3, Number 4

The Editorial.....

WE'D like to make a special note of our cover story for this issue. THUNDER WORLD is the type of story that has made science fiction the adventurous, glamorous type of literature it is. It is not just the action, suspense, or plot detail that accomplishes this; it is the theme: will the advent of space flight produce a new type of *man*?

This is not a conventional type of action story, in the sense that you have a villain dogging the hero every step of the way; the real villain in this story is nature—the nature man will meet when he steps foot on other worlds for the first time. An unfriendly, alien, and in some cases an impossible nature—as far as man is concerned. He will either conquer nature or go down in defeat attempting to. It is a subject that is current—indeed we will live to see man face the supreme test suggested here.

Edmond Hamilton, of course, is an old hand at creating a gripping realism in his stories of the starways. This new novel is no exception. We'll bet you'll be right there with the men who land on Jupiter's chaotic surface, wondering, worrying, hoping, that somehow mankind *can* survive on a planet whose very gravity should crush the life from a frail Earth-bred body. As we said, we think this is one heck of a fine novel, and it's the type of story that has that magical formula of wonder and

intense drama. An orchid to Ed for a job well done, and we'd like to hear your reaction after you finish reading THUNDER WORLD.

BY THIS TIME you've become aware of the fact that in IMAGINATION (our companion science fiction magazine) and TALES, you can count on stories that open up your mind to the wonders of space and Time. To all of us in science fiction this means the kind of entertainment we want, but in line with our previous comments, it also gives us a look at things to come, at the destiny man has been striving to achieve ever since he first left his hillside cave and foraged for new and strange lands across the horizon. When you stop and think about it for a moment, the universe is an awesome thing to comprehend.

Consider that the stars you see in the night sky are *light years* distant; in miles you can figure it out remembering that light travels at approximately 186,000 miles per second. But that's not the staggering part. Our large telescopes reach into space to discover stars impossible to see with the naked eye, stars *thousands* of light years away. In many instances, the telescope eye searches out the feeble light of a star or entire stellar system whose light is just now filtering into our galaxy—stars so far distant that they have been extinct for centuries!

IT'S an awesome thing, as we said; and *that* is the horizon man has been struggling to cross. The first step will be space flight itself within the "backyard" distances of our own solar system. But the big jump will be interstellar flight. (It will take nearly four years to reach the closest star traveling *at* the speed of light!) A few centuries hence some brilliant mind will come up with a new type of space-drive that will either exceed the speed of light (who's to prove it can't be done?) or utilize an entirely new principle to crack what our science fiction

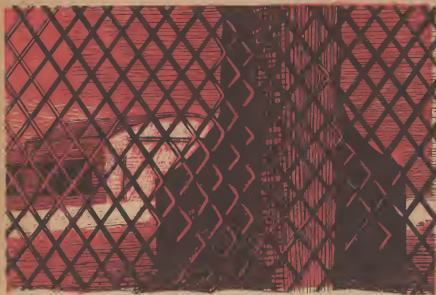
writers call "sub space". Will this be the much speculated upon 4th dimension?

BIG POINT of it all is that in science fiction we get a glimpse into the worlds of tomorrow, the worlds that we will never see in person—simply because we were born a few hundred years too soon! But at least we can read and dream of that coming era—and cheer when we see the headlines announce that at long last a spaceship has reached the Moon. The first step. And that will be sooner than you think! wlh



"Here's our proof that life here is impossible. Tax Forms!"





Farrel knew his father had made a great scientific discovery — and been killed for it; but revenge would lead him to the perils of—

THUNDER WORLD

by

Edmond Hamilton

FARREL BAIRD stood rigid, watching the plane coming across the high white Antarctic peaks. It came fast from a northwesterly direction, its metal

wings shimmering in the pale sunlight, its atomic motors purring.

He thought, *It's only chance that it's coming this way, it doesn't mean they've found us. It'll change*

course in a minute.

It didn't. It came straight on as though those in it knew exactly where they were going, and now it was thrumming over the pass in which Baird stood staring upward.

Inside his dark, close-fitting cold-suit and cloth helmet, Baird began to sweat gently. His tall, rawboned young figure was painfully tense as his eyes followed the now-receding plane.

It *must* be just coincidence, he thought. It'll go on over and away, like all the others.

Baird had seen planes go over before, many times. And they always, in his twenty years of life here, had kept on going. This stark, ice-clad wilderness of interior Antarctica, even now in the 21st Century, was almost as unvisited as it had ever been. The southern hemisphere air-liners, or occasional relief and supply planes for the coastal weather stations, flew over these deathly white ranges but they never landed.

As a boy here, as a youth, he had often secretly wished they would land. He had never seen the lands, the cities, from which they came. They set his imagination afire—they and the space-ships. The space-ships he never really saw, except for a fading streak of fire across the heavens and a roll of thunder as they swept in high

and fast toward the spaceports far northward. But the planes, you could watch them out of sight, and wonder who was in them, and where they were going. And, then, always, they passed on and left you alone again in the white silence.

But not this plane. It was low, and going lower. It was heading right toward that part of the next range where Baird and his father had their cunningly-hidden home.

And now there was no more doubt about it at all. The plane curved sharply round, and swept down between the two ice-clad peaks that towered at the head of their home valley.

"They *have* found us!" Baird exclaimed. "And Dad's there alone—"

He suddenly threw down the hammer with which he'd been chipping ore-samples from the cliff. He began to run, up the long snow slope toward the ridge that lay between himself and home.

He ran very fast, in long, loping strides. The air was thin and gelid, yet he breathed easily as he ran. Neither cold nor fatigue would bother him for a long while. He was proud of his strength and endurance, of the rock-like hardihood that the bitter Antarctic had bred in him. Yet he did not know how much stronger

than other men he might be, for he had known no other men except his father. And John Baird was graying, aging, a little weaker each year, so that no comparison was possible.

The thought of his father was a spur quickening Baird's stride. All the fears of twenty years came thronging into his mind. They were his father's fears, but his father had implanted them into his own mind from the earliest time he could remember.

"Why *can't* we leave the snow and ice and go out to see other people and places?" He could remember a six-year old boy asking that, and John Baird's answer.

"We can't, Farrel. We have to stay here where no one can find us. No one must know where we are."

"But *why*?"

"You'll learn later."

BAIRD WAS halfway up the long slope. He moved quickly and surely over the frozen surface, past the tormented shapes of towering sastrugi or wind-carvings of snow, that rose on the ridge of each long undulation. He placed his feet with the lightness of a cat's paws to avoid breaking the crust, yet he did not once slow his desperate pace.

He tried to tell himself that there

was no reason for panic, that he had been mistaken and that that plane could have gone on out of sight behind the peaks instead of landing in the valley. He couldn't believe that. His eyes were keen. The plane had landed. Men had found them, just as John Baird had always feared.

Who it was that John Baird feared, he had never known. As he had grown, as he had learned more and more of the outside world from the books and the videotapes, of the cities, the crowds, the spaceports, the ships that went even to Mars and Venus—Baird had pressed his father harder for the answer to that question.

"Did you break a law? Is that why we have to live all our lives here?"

John Baird had looked at him sadly. "I broke no law. It isn't that."

"Then what?"

"Listen, Farrel. We'll leave here, when it's safe. But it's not safe yet. If it was known where I am, it would mean death."

"Your death?"

"The death of many, I think." John Baird had brooded. And then he had said, "Let it go, Farrel. For another year. Then—we'll leave."

Another year? Was there going

to *be* another year? For that had been only weeks ago, and now here he was, cresting the ridge, looking down into the familiar rocky valley.

And the plane was there.

It lay upon a long sheet of basalt, a thousand yards from the house. There was no one at all in sight.

Baird's gaze flew frantically to the house as he began his swift sliding run down the upper snow slope into the valley. Nobody but he would have even seen that house, so cunningly was it melted into its drab rocky background.

John Baird had built well, when he came here years ago with his infant son in a heavy ato-cop-ter. He had torn down the cop-ter itself, and had used it for power and for metal to help build his hiding place.

The oblong, flat-roofed cement house was so colored and knobbed and roughened, its windows so artfully invisible from above, that it looked like nothing more than a huge boulder left on this old moraine. There was nothing at all to betray it to fliers passing overhead. There was never any smoke, for the reactor heat-plant made fire unnecessary, and there was no cultivation for that was all inside in the hydro-ponic tanks. No one could possibly find it.

Yet it had been found. The plane glittered blandly in the pale sun, mute evidence of that.

Baird left the snow line, and pitched frantically down the lower rock slopes toward the house. A hundred feet from it, he stopped.

The door had been blown wide open by a blaster, and hung a blackened wreck. There was no sound or movement.

Baird went forward, and then a cry of grief and rage came from him. He could look into the familiar room now, and in there he saw John Baird lying with a blackened wound in his side.

A man in a dark cold-suit was bending over his father. The man turned, his hard, blocky face startled and hostile. Baird plunged forward, in through the shattered door.

A voice behind Baird said, "I've got him, Vail."

A whistling blow took Baird on the back of his head. He tried to turn, but everything was a burning blackness.

Blackness. Pain.

They were all he knew.

Then sensation began to return a little. His face was on the cold floor.

There was a sound of footsteps. Heavy footsteps, that went past him and then came back after a moment, and then passed him again.

Somebody said, "Hurry up."

BAIRD was sucked down into the fiery darkness again, but this time he tried vaguely to fight, to come up, not to give way.

Again, his consciousness clawed at the fringes of reality. The footsteps were still going on, hastening faster now.

A man's voice said, "We've got every scrap of paper in the place."

Another voice said, "I'll start the plane. You take the safety off the reactor. And hurry! We don't want to be around when she goes."

The footsteps hurried, went away, the darkness again tried to drag Baird down, and again he fought it.

He had to move. He had to raise his head and open his eyes, and see the men to whom those voices belonged.

But he couldn't. He knew vaguely what was going to happen. He and his father were going to perish very soon — unless he moved. He willed his arms and legs to work. They remained inert.

His sensations were clearing. He heard a final running of footsteps out of the house, and then the purring drone of the ato-plane taking off.

Silence was in the house now. And death. The death that was

building up now minute by minute in the reactor.

He *would* move his arms. And now, they obeyed his brain's command. Woodenly his fingers stirred. The elbows wobbled, but he pushed himself up to a sitting position. He got his eyes open.

Through a red blur of pain he saw his father lying against the wall. It was very cold now in the room. The Antarctic chill was triumphing.

Baird staggered to his feet. He focused his failing brain on one thought. The reactor. They had taken the safety off. And that meant annihilation very soon, unless—

He moved drunkenly through the house, back toward the reactor room. He could see now that the rooms were a shambles. They had been gutted, while he lay unconscious. Every record, every book, every scrap of paper written or printed, had been taken. Nothing else.

He pitched into the room which held the small, concrete-encased atomic pile which had alone made life possible for them here in the polar cold. One glance at it was enough.

The main control rods had been completely pulled out, and bent and wrecked. The dials showed the neutron-emission rate already

climbing far up into the red. The needles were moving faster.

Baird estimated that he had only minutes — before the mounting radiation was too much for the shield. And minutes after that, would come the 10,000 degree heat and the lethal burst.

There was no possible way of halting the runaway reactor now. It was a time-bomb ticking toward doom.

He turned and ran unsteadily back through the house. His brain was clearing, and he planned with each clumsy stride.

He snatched blankets and a plastic flask of food-concentrate pellets as he went. The flask went into the pocket of the cold-suit he still wore. The blankets, he wrapped hastily around John Baird's limp form.

The minutes were becoming seconds — and frantic urgency brought back some of the hard strength of which Baird was so proud. He rose to his feet, holding his father's slight body, and lurched out the open door.

THE ROCKS of the valley floor wavered in his vision as he ran. There was no time to pick his way. His and John Baird's only chance was to get around the turn in the narrow valley before

the reactor let go.

A slip, a fall, would end hope. But now strength was flooding back faster into his body, his legs. He began really to run.

The turn in the valley, the rock wall that was the only possible shield against onrushing death, came closer. Breathing in great gasps, he staggered around the turn. A few more strides put many yards of granite between himself and the house. Only then did he lower his blanket-wrapped burden to the ground.

The pale Antarctic sunlight suddenly flashed white and vivid. An instant later, a wave of searing heat touched him.

The reactor had gone. Not in any explosion, but in a "melt-down", a terrific flare of heat and radiation.

Baird bent over his father. He had never seen the shadow of death before. Now, looking into John Baird's pallid face, he saw it.

He said, "Just lie quiet. We'll get out of this. I can get you down to the coast stations, and—"

John Baird tried to speak. He said, "—secret—" The words dribbled off in a whisper.

Baird felt clutched by an agony of certainty. Nothing in his twenty years of solitary youth had prepared him for this.

John Baird, looking up at him

from fading eyes, was still trying to speak. This time a name.

"Sherriff." The name came faintly clear. "Sherriff—Outer Planet Bureau—been after the secret for years. Knew he'd never quit. Don't let him get it, Farrel. Don't—"

Baird listened with agonized realization. This, then, was why his father had hidden with him all these years? Guarding a secret, a secret that his enemies must not have?

But—whatever secret John Baird had cherished, it was already stolen! The gutted house, every paper and carefully guarded record in it gone—

How could he tell his father that? Then, looking at John Baird's lax, gray face, Baird realized he would never have to tell him.

He crouched on the rough rock, looking down at the dead face. It had all happened too quickly. The years of solitude, of chafing against their Arctic prison, of nothing ever happening. And now suddenly, all was changed. His father, his home, gone. He was alone in the icy desolation of the cruelest land on Earth. And he still did not even know why it had happened.

All he knew were names. The name his father had whispered, and the name he had heard in the house just before the blow fell.

Sherriff. Vail. Nothing more . . .

CHAPTER II

UP AGAINST the blackness of the polar night streamed shooting rays and twitching fans and calm rivers of colored light, glowing and dancing far across the sky. The cold stars were dimmed by the shifting radiance of the *Aurora Australis*. The icy, terrible chill of the Antarctic night was deepening.

Yet Baird still stood, looking at the rough cairn of rocks that he had built above his father. He knew that he should be going. He had before him a journey of hundreds of miles over the most hostile desolation on the planet. The house and everything in it were a fused wreck. Unless he reached the coast, and soon, he would die. Yet you could not that easily leave the whole of your life, the one person you had known, behind you!

He whispered, "I'll find them. Wherever they are, I'll find them."

A throbbing, single-minded resolution possessed him. It had grown in him as the first shock of grief passed, and as his normal strength returned, his savage determination too had grown stronger.

Out somewhere in the world he had never seen, were men. The men from whom his father had hidden for years, the men who had finally found him, and taken what-

ever secret he guarded. He, Baird, would find them.

"Sherriff . . . Vail . . ."

The names were burned deep in Baird's mind. He would never forget them. And one, at least, of those names he had heard in the past.

His father's dying whisper had given him the clue. "Sherriff—Outer Planet Bureau—" Yes, now he remembered, from nights when he and John Baird had watched the news of the outside world on the ultrawave televisior. Many times, the name of Meriden Sherriff had come into that news.

It was a stormy, controversial name. In the Department of Planets that the World Government maintained, the Outer Planet Bureau fought a constant political battle. The mines and refineries of Mars and Venus were profitable beyond argument. But Sherriff's campaign to conquer the cold outer worlds was frequently questioned. The fact that Outer Planet Bureau had failed to get a foothold on anything but the Jovian satellites fostered criticism of the man who rough-handedly ruled the Bureau.

Sherriff had been often pictured on the televisior, usually with the daughter who went everywhere with him, a grave-eyed young girl. And now Baird realized that

his father had been deeply interested in everything about Sherriff and Outer Planet. Yet he had never, until he was dying, disclosed that he himself had known Sherriff, that Sherriff was his enemy.

Baird told himself that a man as big as Sherriff would not be hard to find. And when he found him, and the men he had sent to hunt down and kill his father . . .

His gloved fists were tightly clenched. With a sharp movement, he turned away from the cairn. He would accomplish nothing by remaining here. It was time to go.

"Another year," John Baird had said. *"Then we'll leave."*

He hadn't had to wait the year. He was leaving now. And tears stung Baird's eyes as he started down the valley.

He clung to his hatred. It was all he had now. Without that hate, and his quest for its fulfillment, he would be lost, bewildered, his whole familiar world reft from him. As it was, he knew where he had to go.

HE MOVED down the valley. He knew the way. How many times he had studied the maps, longing for the day when he and John Baird would go to the outside world! The route was imprinted on his memory.

Northwestward first, through the mountains to the frozen surface of Ross Sea. Then northward over the ice to McMurdo Sound and Ross Island. That was where the nearest coast weather station was. That must be his gateway to the outside world.

But he must not be seen there! Sherriff's men thought they had destroyed both Bairds. They must keep thinking that. No stories must reach them of a man, a survivor, coming from the inner Antarctic wilderness.

"They'll not dream I'm living, until it's too late for them!" he thought.

But how could a man leave Antarctica, how could he cross the ocean to the northern continents, without being seen?

Baird postponed that problem. When he got to the coast, he'd somehow get farther. His goal must be New York. There, he knew were the great bases of Outer Planet and Inner Planet Bureaus. There was Sherriff.

He marched on, over frozen snow, between the spectral white peaks. The blankets made a light pack on his back. They, and his food-capsules, and his pocket-torch, would see him through. It was well he'd always carried the pocket-torch on his hikes, since without it one couldn't melt the

snow that was the only source of water.

The aurora faded. The stars came forth to look down with cold, incurious eyes at the small dark figure marching down the white valleys.

Finally, Baird mastered his savage desire to walk until his legs gave out. The trek was too long for that. He dug a niche in the snow, and wrapped himself in his blankets. It was cold, but he did not mind cold.

Before he slept, Baird lay looking up at the brilliant stars. Among them, one great white orb shone regally.

Jupiter. Sherriff's world. He'd heard it called that, half-mockingly, on the televisior. For Sherriff had sworn that that cold, terrible giant planet could be conquered. No one had yet set foot upon it, but on its biggest moon, Outer Planet had long been preparing for the attempt.

He wondered again, "What secret did Dad have that Sherriff was willing to kill for?"

John Baird had been a scientist. That, Baird knew. Was it a scientific secret that he had guarded? A secret too terrible to be used?

He remembered his father's brooding words, weeks before. *"If it was known where I am, it would mean death. The death of many,*

I think . . ."

Days passed, as Baird steadily marched through the white peaks and passes. He marvelled at his own powers of endurance. Cold, fatigue, seemed powerless to slow him. Twice he fell through snow-bridges into crevasses, once in a twenty-foot fall, and did not even feel badly jarred. Surely his growing up in this bitter land had bred superhuman toughness in him!

At last he went out between gigantic portals of frowning granite, onto the frozen surface of Ross Sea. Still far ahead lay the station at Ross Island, the island that touched both frozen and watery sea. He laid his course and went on over the deathly expanse. Pressure-ridges and sastrugi barred his way. He went over, through, around them.

A gigantic mountain-range appeared far away to the left, the great ranges of South Victoria Land. They drew closer as he swung on.

Nights, he looked up many times at the big white planet slowly wheeling with the stars. Looking at it kept his hate and purpose strong.

Sherriff's world!

The great cone of Mount Erebus came into sight ahead, a guide-post to steer him. He quickened his pace.

In twilight of the next day, he crouched behind an icy ridge and studied the permanent Ross Island weather base.

UNDER THE darkening polar sky, he saw it as a cluster of domes near the dark waters of the Sound. He guessed the biggest dome was living-quarters. By the activity he deduced that another dome held the atomic reactor, still another the snow-tracs, and a fourth one the planes. He looked longingly at the last, as they were hangared. But he could not fly an ato-plane, and the theft of one would surely reach Sherriff's ears.

"The boats," Baird thought. "One of them is the only way."

To a floating pier were moored several small craft, apparently used for sounding, fishing, and the like. Hungrily, he eyed the biggest one.

Night fell. The temperature dropped swiftly. Men scurried into the domes, escaping the deepening chill. Baird, crouching behind his ridge, watched them like a half-frozen, gaunt wolf.

Then he slipped down to the shore. A rapid inspection of the biggest craft satisfied him. It was twenty-six feet long, complete with ato-motor drive and emergency mast and sail. It could take him north. But he must have more

food, or he'd die of starvation long before he reached there.

There was only one place to get the food and supplies he needed, and that was in the big main dome. And it must be done without detection.

The hackles lifted on Baird's neck as he crouched beside one of the small doors in the dome-wall, listening. It was not alone the danger. It was the strangeness.

He found suddenly that other *men* were strange to him. He had known no man except his father. A wild instinct to recoil from them seized him.

But that would be to abandon his quest. Let Sherriff and Vail go unpunished. Forget it all.

"Not that," he whispered. "No."

He turned the heavy latch and silently opened the bulky door a few scant inches.

Inside, there was only darkness. Darkness and silence, and a puff of warmer air that felt queer to his face after the frozen days.

Baird slipped inside, closed the door. He began a silent, prowling exploration. Touch told him that he was in a metal-walled chamber, with skis, snowshoes, heavy synthetic garments hung around the walls.

He found another door. When he opened this a slit, he saw light and heard distant voices.

"—so I told him, what of it?" A big voice speaking loudly, and then several voices laughing.

Baird crouched, tense as a feral animal. The laughter ebbed, but a chatter of voices went on. He peered through the door.

A long corridor of metal stretched in front of him, lighted by occasional ceiling bulbs. Along it were doors. From somewhere down its length came the cheerful intermittent babble.

Baird slipped into the corridor. He went along it, cat-footed, poised for instant action. He listened at a door, then opened it. It was a dark store-room with the smell of oils and chemicals in it.

He went to another, with no more luck. Now he was getting nearer the end of the corridor and the voices. Suddenly—

"Who the *devil* left the lock-door open to freeze all our feet?" came the loud plaint. "You were the last one in, Carson."

A voice made profane answer. Then added, "Oh, all right."

Steps rang loud on the metal floor. Baird whirled, opened the door behind him, slid inside into darkness and silently shut the door.

He heard footsteps clatter past, the slam of the lock door shutting, and then returning footsteps and a grunt of irritation.

Baird relaxed, and of a sudden felt a trembling as he realized that unconsciously he had been poised to strike and kill, if discovered. The fact horrified him.

Then, turning, he found his luck had changed. Familiar cartons brushed his arm—familiar from the store-room at home that held the supplies John Baird had brought there long ago. He turned on the lights.

A shaky sigh escaped him. Everything he needed was here—food-capsules, medical supplies, baled blankets, sleeping-bags, torches. He began taking what he needed, in such fashion the theft would not soon be discovered. With a blanket-wrapped bundle, he snapped off the lights and cautiously opened the door. The corridor was empty, the way clear.

A half-hour later, Baird shoved the twenty-six footer away from the bobbing pier. He had taken time carefully to fray its cable on a sharp edge of ice. It would seem pure accident the boat had broken loose.

Boldly, he started the purring ato-motor. Its noise would never be heard inside the domes. He headed out into the starlit Sound, and found himself struggling with the problem of steering in the short choppy waves.

The wind blew with a gelid

chill off the great peaks that marched along with him on the west. Stiffened, crouching in the stern, he held his way. Ahead was open ocean, and loose pack-ice. He would get across them. The strange powers of endurance that were his would take him through.

He looked up again at the brilliant constellations and at the royal white planet that rode among them.

"Sherriff's world," he repeated, through stiffened lips. "We'll see. We'll see!"

CHAPTER III

ON THE SURFACE of the sea itself flashed and glittered the new city of New York. Far out from the land the marine metropolis extended. Great girders rose from the water, supporting big flat platforms on which the shimmering plastic mansions and villas and shops were built. Almost a century before, the building of the first "Texas towers" had taught that the sea could be built upon, and in the years since then the mightiest metropolis of Earth had expanded ever seaward.

Watery streets and highways led through the miles of this new Venice toward the land. There reared the remaining skyscrapers of older New York, looking old-

fashioned, stiff and dowdy. Beyond them, miles beyond the river, ran the big spaceports. Even now, through the noonday sunlight, there came a rolling thunder from the west as a mighty metal bulk lifted majestically upon a plume of fire, and was gone.

Far out on the Atlantic, in the bows of a plodding freight-ship, Farrel Baird watched the streak of fire go up into the sky.

"Soon," he whispered to himself, his strong fingers tightening on the rail. "Only a few hours, now."

The bitter miles and weeks were behind him, and he was coming to the place where Sherriff was. A terrible tension grew in him.

The dumpy freighter, heavy with uranium ore from South Africa, plodded on over the crisp blue sea. The red-faced captain of the ato-ship spoke behind Baird.

"You won't be sorry to see land again, Farrel."

Baird turned, a little startled. "No, sir. I won't."

The captain chuckled. "I'll bet not. And I'll bet this cures you of lone voyaging for fun. The way we picked you up—it was a damn close thing."

Yes, Baird thought, it had been close. But not quite as close as the captain thought.

He *had* been nearly at the end of

his strength, far down there in the South Atlantic. The hundreds of miles he had come, first through the open pack ice and then north across stormy seas, had taken toll of even his granite endurance. And death from thirst had loomed close.

Then he had sighted the ato-freighter. It was the first ship he had seen, for sea-craft were used now only for the heaviest of cargoes. Baird had retained enough presence of mind to realize the stolen boat could be traced, and had so scuppered it that it was sinking from under him when he was hauled aboard the *Martin P. Green*. A story of a lone-boat voyage that had ended in disaster, and the use of his first name had been easy then.

The captain clapped his shoulders. "You've been a good hand since we picked you up—twice as strong and willing as most. I'll see you get full wages when we dock."

Baird thanked him. Between routine deck jobs, in the next hour, he spent every moment staring ahead. The line of the land came slowly over the horizon.

His tension grew. Somewhere close ahead were Sherriff, and the two killers he had sent on his errand. Vail, and the unknown one, whose face he had never seen.

He would find them!

"How'd you like to be rich and live up *there*?" a fellow seaman asked Baird, a little later.

The *Martin P. Green* was entering the broad fringe of the marine city. On either side of them rose the massive girders, a far-reaching forest, and up above their heads the rims of the villa-platforms cut the sky. Baird glimpsed trees, greenery, the glittering plastic walls of houses and shops, and ato-cars flitting over the level bridges that connected the high platforms.

Deeper into this splendid city of the sea, the dumpy freighter plodded along its watery avenue. It passed beneath bridges. Ato-fliers were numerous in the blue sky far above. The crowded magnificence of the scene was overpowering, to Baird.

The *Martin P. Green* went through the great ocean-suburb into the inner harbor. To the right loomed the old skyscrapers. But the freighter went on to the farther shore and the miles of docks and warehouses and unloading machinery there.

TWO HOURS later, when Baird was paid off, he asked the freighter captain the way to Outer Planet spaceport.

The captain told him but added,

"Say, you're not going to lose your mind and sign up with *them*? They're always trying to talk likely young men into signing up for their crazy outer-world project."

And he called after Baird, "You need a job, you come back to me! A freighter's dull, but better than freezing out on Ganymede!"

Once off the dock, Baird stood in the street, a tall, slightly gaunt figure in his seaman's jacket and trousers, bewildered by the noise and confusion of roaring trucks, crowded sidewalks, shops and people. He was not used to so many people. He was not used to the heat of the sun, the warmth of the air, the never-ceasing clamor of voices.

He walked westward, and came finally into a scummy district of gaudy drinking-places, cheap lodgings, seamy-faced men and women—the sordid blocks that rimmed the spaceport. Ever and again the voices and tinny music were drowned out by a brutal, bellowing thunder from the west.

OUTER PLANET BUREAU ROCKET-BASE ONE, said a big sign. He had got this far on his quest!

Inside a high link fence, beyond the administrative buildings, the spaceport ran level to the horizon. Out there he saw massive concrete

aprons, launching pits, huge traveling cranes, machine-shops, and looming over all the silvery towers of the great rocket-ships. The bellowing thunder shocked his ears again. He saw dust fly up out there, and realized it was merely a rocket-test. But the mighty reverberations, the hurrying of men and machines, the sense of a colossal, ordered confusion, were overpowering.

As he watched, Baird felt a cold despair. The drive of his hatred had brought him here from the bottom of the world. But now he was here, his quest seemed unutterably futile. He a single man, untrained in the world and without friends, faced here the vastness of an organization that was formed to conquer planets. The whole might of Outer Planet Bureau loomed before him—and Meriden Sherriff, the man who *was* Outer Planet, seemed to tower up as invulnerable and powerful as the stars.

He gripped the links of the fence, staring, white-faced. "How can I touch a man like that?"

Then, as he remembered John Baird whispering and dying in the Antarctic valley, his passionate hatred came to reinforce Baird's will.

Sherriff might tower as high as the skies, his hands might reach

to grasp planets, yet he was mortal, he could be pulled down! You could not send men to kill, and go scot-free.

"The men," Baird thought. "Vail, and the other. They're the way to Sherriff."

During the long voyage north, Baird had had time to think and plan. And now, conquering his momentary despair, he remembered his plans.

It was useless for him, a stranger, a nobody, merely to accuse the great Meriden Sherriff of conspiracy to rob and murder. Who would believe him, without proof?

But two men lived who could prove it. Vail, and the other man, who had done Sherriff's bidding. If he could find them and force one of them to confess—then, he could attack Sherriff directly.

He had thought long. And he felt sure that Vail and the other must be men who worked for Sherriff in Outer Planet Bureau. Sherriff would not hire mercenary bravos for such a job—it would lay him open to endless blackmail. They must be two of Sherriff's own men, and there must be a record of Vail here in the Bureau. It was here that he must pick up the trail.

BAIRD WENT to the building marked "Personnel". A cons-

tant stream of men and women passed in and out of it—and many of the men wore the gray uniform of Outer Planet with its ten-mooned insigne.

Inside, he looked a bit bewilderedly at the rows of glass-walled offices, the busy clerks and card-sorting machines and tabulators, but finally spotted a massive card-file and a counter in front of it at which clerks were busy.

When Baird made his request, a bored clerk looked at him. "You mean, you only know a man's last name and his face, and you want us to look him up? It's impossible."

"It would only take a few minutes—" Baird began, but the clerk cut him off impatiently.

"It's not the time. We just don't search our personnel file for every stranger that comes in. Show the front office good legal reason for your request, and they'll give you an authorization." He turned away.

Baird felt frustrated. Ignorant as he was of the procedures of this outer world, he had not dreamed of this stumbling-block to his first attempt.

He looked defeatedly at the long drawers of cards behind the clerks. What he wanted to know was in there—but how to find it? He dared not arouse suspicion by try-

ing to fake legal reasons—it was too risky. Sherriff and his killers must not dream that he was alive, on their trail.

Defeated, worried, Baird found himself again in the dingy street that faced the spaceport. He discovered he was very hungry, and turned in at a shabby hotel's restaurant bar. He bought sandwiches at the noisy, crowded bar, paying with a bill from the roll of his seaman's wages. As he ate, he tried to plan anew.

Vail was the key. Vail's name, and face, were all he had to lead him the way he must go. Since the files of Outer Planet were barred to him, how could he learn Vail's whereabouts?

A bronzed, middle-aged man beside him spoke to him. "You're no spaceman, son. Are you?"

Baird shook his head "I'm a seaman."

The other nodded. "Come to see the rockets, eh? Sure. But let me give you a tip. Some of the cleverets thieves in New York hang out in these spaceport joints. Don't show your money like you just did."

It was a wholly friendly warning, and Baird started to thank the man. Then, suddenly, a thought came to him from the other's words.

He frowned, as though angry.

He said, loudly, "Look, I *worked* for this twelve hundred, hard. I can spend it any way I want."

The bronzed man flushed red. "Serves me right for sticking my neck out. The devil with you." He turned and went out.

Baird called for a drink, and threw another bill on the bar. The fiery cheap liquor nearly choked him, but he got it down. He had another.

He thought some of the seamed face men further along the bar were watching him, but he did not look their way. He had asked the bartender,

"You've got rooms here, haven't you? I need some sleep."

The bartender jerked his head. "In there. At the desk."

Baird paid five dollars to an old man at the desk, signed "John Farrel" on a dirty register, and went upstairs with the combination-number of Room 34.

THE COMBINATION FREQUENCY unlocked the door's electrolock. He looked with distaste around the musty, stuffy little bedroom, as he locked the door. Well, if his idea succeeded, he wouldn't have to stay here long.

The room fronted the spaceport. It was dusk, and out across the horizon the multi-colored spaceport beacons shone in the twi-

lighted sky.

Darkness came. The street below threw a lurid glare of light, and a blare of canned music. Baird made his preparations.

They were simple. He rolled a bolster under the bed blanket to look like a sleeping man. Then he crouched down in a corner of the dark room, near the door.

He waited, then. An hour went by, and nothing whatever happened.

"*The cleverest thieves in New York,*" his would-be friend had said. Well, but perhaps the twelve hundred dollars he'd bragged of so loudly wasn't enough to attract them. It was three times as much as he really had.

The plan that had come suddenly to Baird now seemed hare-brained. But he had no other way in mind to find Vail. He would see this one through.

The hours went by. Just after midnight, there was a blast of thunder from the spaceport. It grew louder, overwhelming all other sounds, so that the noisy street seemed to hush and listen. Through the window, from where he crouched, Baird saw a great, distant bulk riding skyward upon a column of flame, upward until it was out of sight but still rumbling like the wrath of Jehovah across the sky. Would that be one of Sherriff's ships, outbound to

add its load to the great build-up on Jupiter's moon?

Baird thought bitterly how Sherriфф would laugh if he could see the would-be avenger now—crouching in the darkness of this sordid room, hatching his crazy impossible scheme to reach Sherriфф's underlings. And the scheme had failed, for . . .

Suddenly, Baird stiffened. *Had* his scheme failed? He thought he had heard soft footsteps, that paused outside his door.

He waited, moving no muscle. He heard, in a moment, a soft, almost inaudible whining sound. It keened, rising higher.

The door clicked. The right frequency-combination had been applied to its electrolock, by means of some clever portable variable-wave gadget.

The door opened, two dark shapes slid inside, and it closed instantly. There was a sharp, rattling buzz. Baird rose to his feet, soundless as a shadow.

A whisper said, "Sure you nailed him?"

Another, huskier whisper answered. "Don't worry, I blanketed that bed with enceph. He's in dreamland. Get busy."

Baird suddenly reached. His left arm caught a man who uttered a squawk. Baird wrapped his arm around the man, pinioning his

arms and grabbed with his free right hand for the other man.

His right hand touched a coat, but it was going backward. Baird kept his left arm locked like iron around his prisoner, and lunged forward, dragging him along.

Nobody said anything at all in the darkness. But a smooth metal object banged the side of Baird's head hard. It struck again and caught his chin as he charged in. He felt the pain of the shocks, but kept going, reaching, still dragging his prisoner with him.

The other thief in the dark, still frantically moving to elude him, cried out, "He's not human, I can't, I can't—"

CHAPTER IV

BAIRD'S FIST shot out in the dark toward that yammering voice. His knuckles hit flesh and bone, and then there was a yelp and the sound of a stumbling fall. Then silence.

He dragged his prisoner to the door, and turned on the lights. His eyes flew first across the room. The man he had hit, a stocky man with a sodden, ruddy face, lay senseless beside an overturned chair.

Baird looked down at the prisoner he still held. He was a gray, twitchy little man whose

shifty eyes now seemed bulging from their sockets. He made inarticulate sounds and clawed at Baird's vise-like encircling arm.

Baird, with his free hand, took a small hemispherical metal object from his captive's nerveless fingers. Then he tossed him onto the bed.

"I think you broke my ribs," the gray little man moaned. He held his side, and looked up with an agonized, accusing gaze at Baird. "Who the devil *are* you, anyway? You got a grip like a steel bar, you take two smashes on the head and don't go out—like Bloss said, you're not human!"

Baird said, "Just sit there and mind your bruises. Don't try anything."

"Try anything, and my whole side crushed in—!" cried the other. He caught his breath, and sobbed.

Baird knelt beside the man Bloss. He was out cold. He turned back to the moaning figure on the bed.

"What's your name?"

"Kinner, damn you," said the moaning little man.

"Are you one of the cleverest thieves in New York?" Baird asked him.

Kinner stared forgetting his pains. His colorless eyes narrowed. "Say, what is this? What's your game? You set up a trap for

us, bragging about your money—?"

Baird nodded. "I did. And you walked right into it."

"You Police?" asked Kinner.

"No," said Baird. "I'm not Police. I've got my own ideas, and I need a thief to help me. That's why I had to catch one."

He looked down at the hemispherical gadget in his hand. "This is the thing you thought you'd stunned me with?"

Kinner nodded sourly. "An enceph. Short for encephalic ray projector. Knocks a man out for hours."

"Thanks for telling me," said Baird. He pointed the lens of the thing at Bloss, touched the stud. The rattling buzz sounded. Bloss, who had begun to stir faintly, lay limp again.

"Say, listen—," cried Kinner.

Baird said, "You listen to me. You're in a bad fix. If I call Police, what'll happen to you? I imagine you've already got a record."

The unhappy look on Kinner's pinched face convinced him it was true. He continued, "But I don't want you. I just want your help. Help me, and I'll let you go."

Kinner's eyes brightened. "So that's it! You need a side-kick on a job! Hell, if that's all, you didn't need to set all this up and

crush my whole ribs in. You could have just braced me."

"I'm a stranger here," Baird said dryly. "What I need is expert help breaking into a place. Will you do it?"

"Why, sure!" Kinner agreed eagerly. "We'll wait till Bloss comes round, and we'll—"

"Oh, no, we won't," Baird assured him. "Your partner, unconscious here in my room, is my guarantee that you won't give me the slip. You do, and I'll turn him over to the police. I imagine he'll talk to them."

Kinner swore. Then he shrugged. "All right. You've got me cold. Where do you want to break into?"

"Outer Planet Bureau's Personnel building," Baird said.

Kinner leaped to his feet, stung. "Oh, no. That's crazy. It just can't be done. There's guards, photon-eye alarms, and the safes have got electrolocks on them that *no* combo-frequency key will unlock!"

"I don't," Baird told him, "want to open any safe. I don't want to steal anything. I just want to get into Personnel's main file, and go through it to learn something."

Kinner cocked his head like a grimy robin, looking speculatively at him. "Learn what?"

"That doesn't concern you. How about it? Are you going to help,

or shall I call the police?"

KINNER'S FACE twitched.

After a moment he said, "I got no choice. It *might* be done—there not being any valuables in Personnel, it wouldn't be rigged so heavy. Yet it's a three to one chance—" He thought a moment, and added, "I'll need some more gimmicks than I got with me. I'll have to stop at my room."

Baird's hand shot out and closed crushingly on the little thief's shoulder. "All right. But no tricks."

Scared and painwracked, Kinner twisted out of his grip. "My God, Mister, I'd as lief stick my head in a buzz-saw! What kind of a guy are you, anyway? You got a grip like a robot, and you don't feel things any more than one. Maybe you *are* a robot, eh? I saw a telepicture once — "

"Shut up and get started," Baird said impatiently. "I'll lock the door. Your friend will be safe — unless you try to be clever."

He watched Kinner closely as they went out and down the stairs to the street. But the little thief's scared side glances convinced Baird that he was still awed by him. His strength had apparently made a deep impression. Again, Baird wondered at how much harder and stronger his Antarctic upbringing made him than the or-

dinary men of this outside world.

His heart began to pound with excitement as he and Kinner went along the blaring street. He knew the risks he was going to take. But he *must* find Vail, and quickly, and the only quick way was to force the Outer Planet files. He had a grim conviction that he would take far more dangerous risks than these, before he brought Sherriff to justice.

Kinner's room was a dark hole at the back of a nondescript building. The little thief removed a wall panel and rummaged among what seemed to be a complete arsenal of super-modern burglary gadgets. He stuffed one after another into concealed coat pockets whose capacity seemed endless.

"Got everything — I *hope*," he grunted finally. He looked appealingly at Baird. "It'd be easier to crack a real money job and have something for it."

Baird shook his head. "The Outer Personnel building."

Kinner shivered. "It'll be a Government case if they nab us."

They went a long way down the street, and the gaudy joints faded into dark warehouses. Kinner stopped, looked carefully both ways, then led the way across the street to the endless link fence of the spaceport.

He huddled against it. There

was a slight grinding, rasping sound. Baird waited. Presently, Kinner made a gesture. He had cut a three-foot circle out of the fencing. They went through, and Kinner deftly replaced the cut-out circle, affixing it with bits of cord.

"Now," he whispered, "we got to fox the photon-eyes. Keep behind me."

Kinner went forward with utmost caution now, holding out before him a little instrument whose dial-face glowed faintly in the dark.

After a few yards' progress, he stopped dead. "It's here," he whispered. "Photon-eye barrier. You can't see it, but it runs the whole way and if it's broken even a second the alarms go off." He moved the instrument up and down. "From six inches above ground to six feet. We won't creep under it or jump over it for sure."

Baird, alarmed, whispered, "Then we can't get through?"

Kinner chuckled. "A lot of the boys'd never get through. But it takes more than the photon-eyes to stop *me*."

He hunched down and drew little loops of wire, and compact battery-cases, from inside his coat. In the dark, he assembled them by feel, yet seemed to work with expert speed.

"What you do," he muttered to Baird, "is to bend, not break, the rays. Bend 'em upward, to make a hole big enough to get through. Ticklish job, with as many as they've got here."

Baird began to sweat. It seemed to him that hours must have passed, that daylight would come at any moment and reveal them.

But actually, it was only minutes before he heard a faint *snick* and then a grunt of satisfaction from Kinner. "All right now. Come on. And *don't* touch the refracting-loops."

He crept with extreme care between the upright two loops of wire. Baird followed.

Kinner straightened. "Nothing but guards to deal with now. We'll circle around the back of the building."

THEY CAME like shadows to the back of the Personnel Building's white block. They crouched, watching. Behind them now, far back to the west, a banging and hooting and huffing of great moving machines reached their ears. Not even at this hour was there any pause to the great effort going forward for the conquest of the System's biggest world.

Baird wondered, not for the first time, why a man like Sher-

riff who had spent years of his life preparing the mighty Jupiter project that was now approaching its climax—why such a man would have turned aside long enough to hunt down and kill John Baird, and rob him of his secret. Was the stolen secret something Sherriff *needed* for the planetary conquest he planned?

Kinner's arm clutched his sleeve. "There's the back guard. Coming along from that way."

Baird saw the dark shadow, patrolling back and forth slowly behind Personnel and the nearest other building. "How do we get past him?"

Kinner whispered, "The enceph. You've still got it, ain't you?"

Baird brought out the little hemispherical gadget and started to aim it, but Kinner urgently grasped his wrist. "No, not yet. These guards call in, by a pocket-talker. We got to know how often."

They watched the guard. In a few minutes, he drew a flat case from his pocket, spoke into it, and put it away again.

They waited. The Building itself had only a few lights in it, and no activity. Baird eyed it hungrily.

Twenty minutes later, the guard again took the case from his pocket and spoke into it. "Twenty-minute schedule," said Kinner.

"Not much time! Can you do it in that—find what you're after?"

"I'll find it," Baird said. He raised the enceph, touched the stud, swept it a little.

The guard fell silently on the grass. Instantly, they got to their feet and raced silently toward the rear door of the building.

Kinner fumbled with it—again the soft keening whine of the frequency-key mounted. The door-clicked.

In a moment, they were inside the building. Baird raced toward that main file he had seen in the afternoon. Behind him, Kinner looked avidly around the offices.

"Might be *something* worth while in one of these desks," he muttered. "But make it fast, mister!"

There was a shaded light that Baird found lit the files fairly well. He dared not turn on more lights. He found a drawer marked "V" and jerked it open, began riffling the personnel cards.

Each card had a picture, a name, a dossier and references to other documents. "Vacquerly—Vadnier—Vaahsen—Vair—" He went back through the cards, urgently. There was no Vail among them.

He had been so sure that Vail, and the information he needed about him, would be in the file,

that he was unable to believe in his failure. Again he searched the cards, and again without success.

Kinner's hoarse whisper came from behind him. "Not many minutes—*hurry*, mister!"

Baird stood, agonized by irresolution and the sense of failure. He started searching along the whole front of the files. Beyond the alphabetical file, he found drawers marked with symbols.

"Mister! We only got a minute—we got to scram!" Kinner urged.

Then Baird's eyes fixed on a file-drawer's label. "Personnel, Ganymede Base." He tore it open, started through its cards.

A bell rang stridently. Instantly, other bells echoed its warning.

"Run!" hissed Kinner, and was gone, his footsteps pounding.

"Vagros—Vail—" *Vail!* The hard, blocky face looked out at Baird from the card. His eyes flew over the typing below. "*Transferred* Ganymede Base—" And a date followed, a date only weeks before.

Baird felt a shattering despair. His trail had ended. The man he must find first was five hundred million miles away.

CHAPTER V

THE NUMBING shock of disappointment and failure

held Baird petrified, even though more bells had now taken up the strident warning.

His whole plan, the risks he had taken and was taking, had ended in nothing. The man Vail who was the first objective of his bitter hatred was as far out of his reach as though at the farthest star.

A siren screeched, in the distance. The sound prodded Baird out of his momentary paralysis. He must not be caught here! That would indeed be the end of his quest. He could plan later what to do, but right now he must move fast to escape. He slammed the file-drawer shut and ran, his heels pounding out echoes down the empty halls.

Baird plunged out of the building into the darkness, ran past the prone figure of the senseless guard, and then abruptly stopped and recoiled. He had delayed too long. A car, its searchlight blazing, was racing toward Personnel Building from some guard-station farther along the front. Its siren wailed a sound like the note of doom. That car would be on him before he could hope to get away.

Recoiling, Baird's foot stumbled on the outflung arm of the unconscious guard. Tense, hunched like a trapped wolf, Baird suddenly found inspiration in the touch.

He stopped, dragged the senseless guard into the shadows behind the building. In an instant he had the man's uniform coat and cap off him, and put them on himself, pulling the visor of the cap well down.

The guard-car's searchlight slashed blinding light across him. Baird ran out, toward the car, and pointed off into the space-port.

"That way!" he cried. "Get him!"

The car instantly careened in a racing curve and rushed away into the darkness of the great tarmac, its searchlight sweeping swiftly.

Baird ran, the other way, around the building and toward the distant street-lights. He plunged through the unseen photo-beam barrier, careless now how many alarms sounded. He tore off the guard's coat and cap and dropped them, as he reached the fence.

Running along the fence, he spotted the hole in it. That Kinner had already gone through, and fast, was evident from the fact that the cut-out section of the linking had not been replaced at all. Baird dove through, and lunged across the street and in between two dark warehouses.

He stood in the shadows, breathing in gasps that were from nervous strain rather than exhaustion.

Across there on the spaceport, more cars were out. But the sirens stopped, and presently the alarm-bells cut off.

Baird groped his way through dark alleys until he was well away from the spaceport, then came onto a well-lit, busy street. In its throngs, he felt safely anonymous.

He dared not go back to the shabby hotel. There was no reason to go back now, anyway. The thief Bloss he had left knocked out there would come to, in time, and go rapidly away. And there was nothing more to learn at the spaceport.

He had learned enough, Baird thought bitterly. In all his clever planning, he had not reckoned on this.

It had seemed so simple. Find Vail, force him to confess, use his confession to bring Sherriff and the other man to justice. Simple—yes.

"And now it's hopeless," he thought. "Vail out there on Ganymede—and nothing but Outer Planet rockets *go* to Ganymede, even!"

He had to accept the fact that Vail was beyond his reach, that his plans were wrecked. But he would not accept ultimate failure. He would get Sherriff, some other way!

Baird walked the streets, his

mind seething with frustration, with anger and doubt, and he saw only vaguely the faces he met, the places he passed. He felt utterly alone, in this vast city. And alone, he must somehow find new plans, new ways, to pull down one of its greatest figures.

Yet how—*how*? His brain turned over a thousand impossible schemes, and rejected them all as hopeless. As the hours went by, he came near to final despair.

DAWN FOUND Baird on the Palisades, sitting hunched on a bench and staring without seeing at the gray light welling up from the distant east. The sun rose. Its beams flashed in reflected brilliance, all along the coast of the marine metropolis—the plastic and glass and metal splendor out there on the farflung platforms above the ocean.

He thought savagely that Sherriff, right now, was probably sleeping in safe peace in one of those glittering villas. A raging impulse took Baird, to seek out the man and take him by the throat. What else was left to do?

No. That would be to admit final failure, indeed. He would probably be seized before he ever got to Sherriff. And if he made an accusation, what proof could he offer? His father's dying words?

Who would convict the famous head of Outer Planet Bureau, on such evidence as that?

His only hope for proof had been in Vail, and Vail was far away. As if to mock Baird, he heard behind him the far thunder of another great rocket going skyward into the sunrise.

"Going out to Ganymede," Baird thought, sick with defeat. "If only *I* could go there, after Vail—"

Of a sudden, Baird remembered something. And it made his deadened hopes spring frantically to life.

There *was* a way he could follow Vail to Ganymede. He remembered now what the captain of the *Martin P. Green* had told him, in farewell warning.

"They're always trying to talk likely young men into signing up for their crazy outer-world project . . ."

Baird knew that that was true. He remembered the talk of the seamen on the freighter. Outer Planet Bureau eagerly recruited every man it could obtain for the Ganymede base. He had seen the recruiting booth, and its alluring posters, in the Personnel Building yesterday.

It was small wonder, from what he'd heard, that they found it so hard to enlist men. Soon, the first

attempt at conquering and colonizing Jupiter would begin. The difficulties of the project were such that it had taken decades to prepare for it. Few men, however adventuresome, wanted any part of the first descent on dreaded Jupiter!

Baird sprang to his feet, quivering. The way had been plain all the time, and he had not seen it until now. The way to Ganymede, to Vail.

It would mean becoming one of Sherriff's army of men. That would be ironical indeed. Sherriff's ambitions would get Baird to Ganymede, to the man and the proof that he would use to destroy Sherriff.

"I'll be your man, Sherriff," Baird whispered. "I'll go to Ganymede. But when I come back—"

Three hours later, at the spaceport, Baird walked into the Personnel Building. It was as busy and unruffled as on the previous day. There was no sign of the night's alarm.

He went straight to the recruiting booth. An intelligent-looking official wearing the gray uniform with its ten-mooned insignia looked almost amazed when Baird stated his intentions.

"You mean you're going to join up with Outer Planet, just like that?" he said. "Don't you

know—" He shut off hastily. His business was to get recruits, and it did not seem that he had been busy lately.

He launched into a fervid talk. "Five hundred a month and all expenses. Six-months limit of service on Ganymede, including—" he eyed Baird and said it hastily—"including possible service on Jupiter. Guaranteed compensation, insurance, and—"

Baird cut him short. "It's okay. I'll sign."

The official stared. "Listen, you're not a fugitive from the law, are you? We've got to check, you know."

Baird said, "I'm not wanted. I want to try space, that's all. I'm John Farrel, of South Africa, orphan. No references—I lost them all in a small-boat sinking, and nearly lost my neck with them. The captain of the *Martin P. Green*, freighter in dock, can vouch for that."

"We'll check it out," said the other. He hastily shoved over a form. "Here's your year contract with Outer Planet. Sign here." Baird signed. The other added, "Contingent, of course, on your passing the physical. Downstairs in the medic rooms. I'll show you."

THE MEDIC rooms were a mass of gadgets such as Baird

hadn't seen before. He was put into a chair. Electrodes were fastened to his body in many places. Needles bobbed on the face of a nearby panel, and tapes crept silently to record the findings.

"Preliminary acceptance indicated," grunted the chief technician when the electrodes were removed. "The chief will send along the report."

"Good enough," said Baird's mentor. He led the way back up to the booth. "You've got to report within 24 hours."

Baird shrugged. "I'm reporting now."

Again the other stared. "I've seen space-fever before, but you sure have a double case of it. All right, I'll take you. Your base is right on the port."

But the spaceport was a vast place. Baird found that out when the other drove him in a fast atocar around the rim of the area.

They went, not toward the great cranes and shops and rocket-towers out on the tarmac, but to low flat-roofed cantonment buildings strung along the northern rim. There was activity around these barracks, and Baird stared in amazement when he saw its nature.

A giant, manlike metal figure stalked toward their car. At first, he thought it a massive robot. Then he saw the face-plate, the

human face inside. The thing stalked majestically by, with a whirring of motors and gyroscopes, moving a bit unsteadily, unsurely.

"A Walker," the recruiting official told Baird. "You'll learn all about them."

There were other Walkers, other men in the massive mechanisms, striding slowly to and fro. One went over with a great crash. A stocky, cursing man in gray uniform rushed out to it.

"Goddamn it, Lind, you let your gyroscope go off again. Ah, he can't hear me—get the so-and-so up again!"

To this furious individual, Baird was turned over. "For your squad, Shaner. His name's Farrel."

"Oh, hell, that does it," swore Shaner. "How am I going to train new men in the time we got?"

The other shrugged. "You want a full squad before you blast off, don't you? See you."

He drove away, leaving Baird. Shaner looked after the car and cursed softly and deeply. Then he turned. "All right, Farrel. Nothing personal. Come along and I'll show you where to draw your uniform."

That night Baird lay in a barracks cot, one of a row of sleeping men, but he did not sleep. He lay looking out the window at the bright blob of light low down

among the southern constellations. Jupiter. Sherriff's world. And there were moons out there, and on one of them the man he sought, and he would soon be on his way.

Next morning, the squad-leader Shaner told Baird, "I'll give it to you straight. We'll be blasting off before you and some of the others get all the training you *ought* to have. But some things you got to know. One of them is how to use a Walker."

"Those big armored suits?" Baird asked. Shaner nodded.

"They're more than armor. They're your skin, your air, your life, and all that'll keep you from getting gravity-crushed, if you get on Jupiter. Now don't get the wind up," he added hastily, "chances are you won't be in on the Drop at all. But you got to know, in case you are. Joy, you show him the first principles."

Joy, a big, shock-haired fellow recruit, told Baird after Shaner left them, "That stuff about not being in on the Drop is for the birds. They'll ram every man into the first drop on Jupiter, that's tool enough to let them. Don't learn how to run a Walker *too* well."

BAIRD SPENT the morning and most of the afternoon learning from Joy how to enter the

massive suits, how to adjust the gyroscopes, how to rig the inner elastic skinform to his body, to adjust stride, to turn.

He gathered from the talk that the others in the squad were in a queer state of morale. They all, more or less, had space-fever—they were all young men who wanted to go to Ganymede. But none of them had any desire to be picked for the actual first Jupiter drop.

There had been too much talk about Jupiter, in past years. Sherriff's plan had been too much debated, attacked, and defended. The nightmare perils of that planet whose gravity alone would crush an unarmored man to death were too well known. They had a dread of the coming attack on the giant world.

Baird had no dread. He had no intention of being on that Drop. He wanted only to get to Ganymede—and to Vail.

That afternoon, a stir went through the squad as Shaner hurried out to greet an arriving car.

"Look at him go," said Joy. "He's afraid of getting his pants burned. It's the old man himself."

Baird's heart gave a great leap. "Sherriff?"

"Yeah. That's his daughter Elda with him. Goes everywhere with him, like a son. Some dish—"

Baird did not hear. A red blur had come across his vision and he stood with tight-clenched fists, looking at the figures in the car.

The girl who drove, mannish and handsome in jacket and slacks, he hardly saw. The man beside her, the man Shaner was talking to rapidly, held his eyes.

He whispered, "Sheriff."

Not as high as the stars towered Sherriff. He was a man, he was past middle age, he was heavy of figure and face. But it was the face of an old Egyptian king-statue, granite in its gray, harsh strength.

But the granite had been crumbled a little, by the years. Lines showed in it, lines that had no softness in them at all. The eyes that looked at Shaner were a glint beneath shaggy, graying brows.

Baird thought, "If I walked out there, if I took hold of him—I if I just—"

He was back in a white Antarctic valley, and a dying man was whispering, and the whole world was a vagueness of raging hatred.

He forced himself to stand still. Not yet, he thought. *Not yet!*

Sherriff spoke briefly, rapidly, to Shaner. He nodded to the girl, and she drove on.

Shaner came back, sweating. "We got to step it up, he says. All right, damnit, step it up we

will."

Baird watched the car out of sight, hungrily. When he saw another come an hour later, he hoped it was Sherriff again. He wanted to look at him, to watch his face.

But it was the recruiting official who had brought him here the previous day. He spoke to Shaner, then came directly to Baird.

"You have to come back with me, to Personnel," he said brusquely to Baird. His face looked worried.

"What's the matter?" Baird asked.

The other shook his head. "I don't know. They sent me to bring you. It's urgent."

They found out something about you— A cold premonition swept Baird. Had he failed again?

CHAPTER VI

BAIRD WAS taken to one of the medic rooms beneath Personnel Building. In the room was only one man, a lanky scholarly-looking man of fifty who looked inquiringly at Baird through rimmed glasses.

"Dr. Naramore, chief of space-medicine," said the recruiter. "Here's Farrel, doctor."

He turned and went out. Baird, his heart hammering, faced the

doctor. Don't admit anything! he told himself. Even if they *have* found out who you are, you've got to play it out as long as there's a chance.

Naramore said, "Your physical check-up was fouled up—some of the machines out of order. I've got to run another check on you."

Baird did not relax. He did not believe the explanation. Why would they have the chief of Outer Planet's space-medicine division run a routine physical check? There was more to it than that.

But he sat down in the chair, and let Naramore affix the electrodes to him. Play it out! After all, they might *suspect* he was John Baird's son, and yet not be sure.

Naramore eyed him as the gadgets clicked and whirred, and the tapes crept. The close attention of the space-surgeon increased Baird's conviction. No ordinary recruit would rate all this!

The gadgets fell silent. Naramore took off the electrodes, and then removed the tapes from the recorders. He looked for minutes at them. Finally, he looked at Baird, and Baird thought he saw startled amazement in the surgeon's eyes.

"Well?"

"You check out all right," Naramore said.

"Then I'll go to Ganymede?"

The space-surgeon nodded. "Surely. I imagine, from what I hear, it won't be long either."

Baird felt surprise. Was this all there was to it? Maybe he had been too suspicious, after all. Maybe . . .

"Your card says you come from South Africa," Naramore was saying.

Baird nodded. Naramore went to his desk. Baird stood up, uncertain if he were dismissed yet. His confidence was returning.

Naramore suddenly turned, and held a small photo under Baird's eyes. "Do you know this man?"

John Baird, his father, looked up at him from the photo! A very much younger John Baird, but unmistakably he.

The blood pounded in Baird's ears. He'd been right the first time. They knew. Or at least, they strongly suspected him. But he wouldn't help them, damn them. He wouldn't just give up.

"No," said Baird levelly. "I don't know him. Who is he?"

"His name," said Naramore, eyeing him, "was Dr. John Baird. A very great space-medicine man twenty years ago. In fact, he headed Outer Planet's space-medicine division in those first days, and was my superior."

That was something Baird had

never known! His father had never said that he'd worked for Sherriff, that he'd been a space-surgeon at Outer Planet. The revelation startled Baird afresh.

But he kept his voice steady. He said, "I guess that was before my time."

"Yes," said Naramore slowly. "I guess it was." He put the photo away. He said, "All right, Farrel. You can go."

Baird stared at him. "You mean—back to my squad?"

"Of course," said Naramore. "Where else?"

Baird left the building, bewildered. Then he thought he understood. They *suspected*, for some reason, that he was John Baird's son. But they couldn't prove it. So — they were giving him more rope.

When you thought about it, it was the cleverest thing Sherriff could do. If Baird was a danger to them, where better to send him than out to Ganymede, far from Earth, out there where everything was under Sherriff's iron control?

It shook Baird a little, that realization. If he was right, he would be going right into the enemy's citadel when he went to Ganymede.

But—Vail was there. Vail, and maybe also the unknown other who had actually killed John

Baird. There alone could he secure damning proof against Sherriff.

"So they suspect me," Baird thought. "I'll still go through with it. And if I can make Vail talk, I'll still blow Sherriff wide open!"

DURING THE NEXT few days, Baird went about his training with a constant expectation of he knew not what. If Sherriff suspected his identity, why did he not act?

As he trained with the Walkers and the hauling-tracs and other big machines he'd been assigned to learn, Baird began to think that he had been right and that Sherriff was biding his time till he was on Ganymede.

Then, six days later, a rough hand shook Baird awake before dawn. He found Shaner bending over him, his face strained and anxious.

"This is it," Baird thought. But he was wrong. Shaner said:

"Roll out. We blast off this morning."

An excitement crackled through the barracks as the newly-awakened men took it in. "But I thought we were going to train weeks more—"

"It's not *my* idea," Shaner assured them. "A bunch of raw lubbers like this— But a rocket's taking off, and they've got room

for our squad in it, so we go. The old man's getting in a hurry, these days!"

By ten o'clock, Baird stood with the rest of the squad on the tarmac, loaded down with everything from heavy moon-shoes to first-aid kit. Other squads—a half dozen of them—were drawn up nearby.

Whistles blew. From the giant rocket that towered over them like a skyscraper, lights flashed a signal. The squads started moving up the gangway. In fifteen minutes, all were inside. They heard the great doors grinding shut.

Baird looked around as curiously as the others. There was nothing to see. They were in a windowless iron room, with recoil-bunks around its walls. Shaner got them into the bunks at once.

"Take your pills and pray," he told them.

They strapped in, took the anti-shock pills, and waited. In four minutes, the world seemed to blow up underneath the rocket.

They were slammed deep into the recoil-springs. And roaring, raving flame, the big rocket went up and up like an elevator that was never coming down. Smothered cries of pain came from the bunks.

Baird thought, amazed, "Why, it doesn't even bother me—at least, not yet!"

He felt the shock, but it didn't hurt. He saw the agonized faces of other men in nearby bunks, but felt no agony himself.

The crash and roar went on. It stopped, after what seemed a long time. Then it started again, and after a shorter interval, ceased.

Baird unstrapped. He got out of the bunk, remembering instructions about using the hold-rods, and helped a sick-looking Shaner get down. Shaner stared at him.

"What the devil, you took blast-off better than I did and I've done it four times!" Shaner exclaimed. "You made of steel?"

"It didn't bother me much," Baird said.

But he thought he knew. He'd already found that his lifetime in the cruel Antarctic had bred in him a toughness exceeding that of other men.

There began a timeless period for Baird, as for the others. They were flying out farther and farther from Earth in a great curve. Yet they could see nothing, hear nothing. They were prisoners in an iron room, an iron routine.

THE DAYS, the weeks, went by.

Men sickened, and recovered. Men blew their tops and cursed Jupiter and Ganymede and Sherriff, and were strapped into their bunks until they cooled down.

Baird remained less affected than any of them. The years of cold silence and solitude stood him in good stead now. And he hugged a bitter purpose that would carry him through. Every day, every hour, brought him nearer to Vail.

He grew a stubbly beard. Others in the squad were doing so, and Baird reasoned that it would effectively disguise him from recognition by Vail. After all, Vail had only seen him briefly months ago. The man would not be likely to know him now.

Unless Vail had already been warned of his coming, and was waiting! It was certain that Naramore suspected the truth of his identity, and that meant that Sherriff must suspect also. Yet they had let him go . . .

Scuttlebutt went up and down the rocket's squad-rooms. Gossip and guesses as to what awaited them on Ganymede.

"They say the preliminary drop on Jupiter will start soon after we get there. Hope to God they're not waiting for *us*!"

"Aw, they got men enough already for that first one—it's only to take down equipment and material, to have waiting for the big drop later. You'll know the real drop is coming, when you see the old man out there."

"You mean old Sherriff is going

on the big one? Hell, he's over fifty—and don't look so good, either."

Shaner said impressively "You wouldn't look so good either if you'd been back and forth to Gany-mede as often as he has. But don't worry—when they really go down onto Jupiter in force, he'll be there."

Baird worried over that. If Sherriff led the main expedition and it succeeded, Sherriff would be so big a hero that nobody, no proof, could touch him. He must find Vail fast, squeeze the truth out of him quickly. It would be a bitter retribution indeed, to strike Sherriff down before he could take the last crowning step of his ruthless career.

"Hope he brings that daughter of his with him," Joy was saying. "Elda Sherriff would brighten it up at Ganymede." He uttered a low whistle.

Shaner said scathingly, "For your information, she's been there twice already with the old man, and she's four times as good a spaceman as you'll ever be. Knock it off."

The blind, silent days went on. Once each week, a small detail was allowed to spend a half hour in an observation port, and that was the only break in the deadening prison-like routine.

There was little to see, from the port. Baird stared at a blackness sown with glaring lights, and tried to trace the familiar constellations, but could not. It was the vista of a dream, unreal, a depthless curtain of dark and light, and nothing more.

The weeks dragged by, and then there was a quickening of mind and body. They were getting near. Ahead of them the giant planet and its moons were marching their way, converging toward the rocket's path.

"And this will be a damn sight worse than take-off," Shaner cheered them, as they strapped in.

It was. The *crash-crash-crash* of braking blasts seemed to go on forever. The shock and roar became unendurable.

Unendurable, to all but Baird. He took it, and it didn't bother him. The others, half in stupor, wondered at his imperviousness.

"You sure you're not a robot?" said Joy weakly, and made Baird think of the little thief Kinner, far back on Earth.

The others were almost out by the final landing moments, but Baird heard and felt the last blasts and the jarring shock of landing.

It took Shaner many minutes to get the others out of their bunks and on their feet. They fumbled

to put on the heavy-soled moon-shoes, gasping from the effort. Ganymede had atmosphere, contrary to earlier astronomers' beliefs, but it was thin and poor in oxygen.

THEY SHAMBLED out of the rocket, most of them too sick and shaky to take interest. But Baird eagerly looked as they came down the gangway.

Dark and wild stretched the surface of the biggest moon in the System, a lifeless world of rocks that rose in steep crags and fell away in deep defiles. An icy cold that felt very familiar to him struck through his insulated suit. In his moon-shoes, he shuffled clumsily.

The great rocket stood upon a plateau, and across it rose other silvery rockets. Beyond them were the prefab metal buildings of a considerable base, with supply-dumps of heavy machinery nearby.

Down upon all fell a throbbing white light. Baird looked up, and felt awe. The vast cloudy, belted bulk of Jupiter seemed to span half the heavens, a swollen giant poised to fall upon their heads. The mind recoiled from the sheer hugeness of the greatest of planets.

"*This way!*" rang Shaner's voice thinly. "Can't you move your big feet?"

They shuffled and stumbled

clumsily across the gritty plateau, toward the buildings. Other men stood at one side and watched them, jeering at their lubberliness.

Not until Baird had them into a squad-hut was Baird able to put off the hypnotic influence of the overhanging planet. But then his thoughts and hopes leaped up.

He was here, in the place where Vail was. He had come a long, long way, and now he would not be denied.

Later as they lay weakly in their bunks, Shaner got them to their feet again. "Assembly at 18.20 in Main Base. And you walk in like men, not like sick babies! If Farrel can do it, the rest of you can."

"Farrel isn't human," said Joy. "Anyway, I *feel* like a sick baby."

But at 18 hours, Shaner had then crossing the area to Main Base building. Other squads were pouring into the big room. There were over two hundred gray-uniformed men here.

Baird's eyes searched feverishly for Vail. He could not see him. Yet the man must be here . . .

"This is a briefing by Willis, the commander," Shaner muttered to him. "The preliminary drop goes tomorrow. Be thankful you're not with those birds in front who are going on it."

It was a sober-faced double-squad of men he indicated, down at the front of the room below the little platform. Baird looked that way.

He saw Vail. Vail wore a squad-leader's insigne, and he was standing at the very front, his hard, square face sulky in expression.

Baird began to quiver. He thought, "Oh, no, he can't be going, not when I've come all this way, not when he's right in my hand—"

Willis, the base commander, a gaunt man of forty, was speaking to them now.

"—and tomorrow makes history. Fifty of you will take the first depot of equipment down. You'll be the first men ever to set foot on Jupiter, for the two preliminary reconnaissances by rockets made landings only, and no one went outside. You'll be preparing for the coming big drop, and you should feel honored."

The men in the front of the room, Vail and the men around him, did not look as though they felt honored. Willis' voice hardened.

"I had hoped we'd have volunteers enough for this first drop. We didn't, so some of you were drafted for this duty. I want to say right now, that others here are going to be drafted for the big drop too, when and as we need

you. It's in your contract. So make up your minds to it."

Baird's mind was wild with apprehension, he hardly heard the words. He would *not* let Vail get away again!

Then, the way came to him. No chance remained of getting to Vail before the drop next day. But there was another way.

An hour later, Baird and Shaner faced the commander, in his office. Shaner spoke bluntly.

"This is recruit John Farrel. He wants to replace one of the drafted men, in tomorrow's drop, as a volunteer."

Willis looked surprised. "A new man? No. Not enough training."

Shaner said, "He can run a Walker. And he takes it better than any man I ever saw. If he wants the duty. I recommend him strongly."

Less than a dozen hours later, at 6.25, Baird was again in a rocket, with Vail and fifteen other men, blasting off for Jupiter and Drop One.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROCKET'S tubes crashed frantic flame ahead, as it plunged headlong down. But their roar was drowned by the gigantic hubbubs of thunder that rocked

the cloud-envelope of Jupiter. Lightning, in bolts and sheets and flares, lit the heavy clouds with blistering radiance. And even above the crash of the brake-jets, that huge thunder-roll of the mightiest of planets reached the ears of the men, crushing their minds with awe.

All except Baird. Strapped in his bunk, he lay, almost never taking his eyes off Vail. Across the iron room he could see the hard, battered profile of the man, and the sight steadily fed the bitter hatred that had led him this long way. A long way indeed, from the icy valley at the bottom of Earth to the giant planet that lay below!

The voice of Carew, commanding this first drop, came from the loudspeaker in the wall, sounding metallically over the racking thunder.

"Coming in on Deceleration Schedule Four. Blast warning."

Again, the rocket shook to the brake-blasts, its jets desperately fighting the planet's vast gravitational pull. Between blasts, they could hear a whistling roar along the hull.

They were, Baird knew, diving deeper into the clouds. Already they must be well beneath the thin upper layer of methane that men had once mistakenly thought com-

posed all the planet's atmosphere. And somewhere in the cold damp vapors below, the surface was rushing upward.

The crashing shocks did not bother him, any more than blast-off had done. He continued to watch Vail. Vail, Arthur, Squad-leader, Ganymede Division, a scared man in a bunk—and a key to vengeance.

Baird planned feverishly. They would be on Jupiter less than forty-eight hours, to carry out their preliminary build-up. He would have to get Vail alone, within that time. In the crowded quarters at Ganymede Base, he might never have a chance. He must make that chance here.

Down through the swirling vapors, the rocket fell like a shooting star on its pre-plotted course. Its braking blasts became continuous and it fell more slowly, riding a falling column of fire. It hovered, poised, bumped—and was landed.

In the squad-room, as the rockets cut off, Baird heard only the echoing roll of thunder outside. Then came cries of alarm.

"My God, I can't breathe—can't raise my arm—"

Baird felt it, too. They were in the grip of Jupiter, of a gravity many times that of Earth, and every limb felt leaden. It took an

effort for him to raise to a sitting position in the bunk.

But again, Baird felt his tough quality of hardness and strength come into play when called upon. His body seemed to brace itself against the terrible drag, his arms moved less numbly, his breathing became less labored. He unfastened the strap-buckles.

Farsetti, the man in the next bunk, looked at Baird with wide eyes. "How the hell can you do it, Farrel? I can't move—"

Vail's voice cut in harshly. "You can all move. You've got to. It's only to the Walkers—then it'll be easier."

Baird saw that Vail had dragged himself out of his bunk. Vail's face was twisted with pain and effort, and he hung to a stanchion.

"Get up. Get moving. If Farrel can do it, you can."

Yet, minutes later, as they moved down to the lowest cell of the rocket, the men were crawling rather than walking.

Carew, their commander, was there, and he too was hanging on. The rocket crew-men who were preparing to open the lock were staggering as they worked. The big metal Walkers loomed here, like waiting giants.

"You squad-leaders have your orders," Carew said. "Unloading must be strictly on schedule. Re-

member, stay in your Walkers every minute."

BAIRD CLAMBERED into his own big Walker, adjusting the harness, opening the flow from the oxygen-flask, manipulating the big mechanical arms and switching on the gyro-stabilizers.

The others got into the Walkers. Baird hungrily marked the number of Vail's—D-1. He would not forget it.

"Testing communics," came Vail's harsh voice. "Sound off."

Presently the lock doors opened. Both doors slid wide, and swirls of mist came into the rocket-cell.

Hoarse halloeing of gigantic thunder sounded louder in their ears. Baird peered out through his face-plate but could see only the mist. The crewmen were running down the sectional ramps to form a long gentle slope to the ground.

Carew led off, his AA-marked Walker striding down the ramp. Now orders began to sound on the communics. Orders to rig the unloading hoists, to break open hatches, to step lively.

Baird had not taken his eyes off the D-1 Walker. He heard Vail's voice, "D-Squad this way! Come on!"

Walker D-1 strode ponderously out and down the ramp. Baird stalked close behind, feeling even

in the protective carapace the drag of gravity, but with all his muscles functioning almost normally.

He seemed to stride out into a hellish chaos of sound and light and mist. The mind-shattering explosions of thunder from far up in the cloud-envelope were accompanied by ghastly flares and rivers of lightning that each time illuminated the misty scene about him.

The towering rocket stood upon a plateau of dark rock. Far to the west, there rose cluttered ranges of icy peaks. Toward the east, he could glimpse where the plateau dropped off in a steep slope, and away in that direction the mist was lit by a steady, infernal orange-red glow.

They were, Baird knew, on a shelf above one of the great volcanic areas. In these rocks were the rare metals and minerals that were the reason for the attempt to conquer Jupiter—unearthly elements formed in the unimaginable pressure deep in the planet and then brought to the surface by past volcanic action. That was why their base must be near the dangerous volcanic region. Someday, if Sherriff's coming big drop made good his grasp on the planet, there would be mines and refineries here.

Even as Baird looked about him, another rocket roared down through

the mist to land. Ten minutes later a third landed nearby. Drop One was all here, and now began the toiling, urgent work of unloading equipment and setting up the prefab metal Command Hut, hospital, and supply-dumps for the bigger expedition to come. Already metal crates were being swung out of the hatches of their own rocket, and the men in their Walkers were striding clumsily to the task.

Nightmare scene, to Baird's eyes! The swirling mists, heavy with fumes from the vulcanism eastward. The rockets looming spectral in it, the unhuman shapes of the Walkers stiffly moving about, the men in them showing pale, drawn faces through their faceplates. And above all the thunder, the volleying of titan explosions in the sea of atmosphere above them, the flash of dancing lightning up there that never ceased.

Men's voices chattered on the communic—the voices of Squad D who used their own especial wavelength.

Farsetti's voice, choked and thick. "Can't move—my arms won't work. What am I going to do, my arms won't move, they—"

Vail was cursing him. "It's just gravity cramp. Damn it, you can move if you try."

Baird strode closer as Farsetti's Walker swayed. "Take it easy, Farsetti. Just relax, you'll get over the cramp—"

"Nobody's taking it easy!" Vail's voice, raw and a little ragged. "Sooner we get this done, sooner we're out of this place."

Like strange, stiff automatons, the armored men worked on in the mists of this thunder-racked world. The rockets discharged their cargoes, the low, massive prefab buildings were being bolted together. Hours went by, and the misty daylight waned. Flares went on high on the rockets, to join with the sheeting lightning and cast a lurid illumination.

A Walker went over with a crash as the man in it passed out. Others dragged him to the rocket and the unloading-hoist hooked on and drew him in. And more and more of the men gave way to gravity-cramp, as the toil went on.

Baird heard a voice in his communic saying, "Once back on Ganymede, I'm *through* with this! Sheriff, can have this planet if he wants it!"

BAIRD FELT an almost passionate exultation in his own more-than-normal strength. He had felt no gravity-cramp, had suffered no weakness. He labored with the mechanical arms of the

Walker, lifting, pulling, fastening, and felt no more than normal fatigue, though men around him were giving up ever more frequently. He was strong, stronger than any of them, than Vail or Sheriff, and the battle would be to the strong!

But his suspense mounted feverishly as he worked, and watched Vail. Not one chance had he had yet to get Vail alone, and in a few more hours they'd be blasting back to Ganymede . . .

Then Vail's edgy voice cut in on the communic. "It's our job to help place the radar warning-beacons out on the plateau, for the big drop. Farrel, Thomas, Kostos—grab two each and come along."

The squat, self-powered, compact beacons were heavy, but the Walker arms lifted them by their hooks easily. The four men, four striding metal giants, started in the mists.

"They go a quarter-mile apart along the edge of the drop-off slope," Vail ordered. "Come *on*, Kostos!"

"I can't," came Kostos' voice. And Thomas' voice added, "I've got a gravity-cramp in one leg, right now."

Baird instantly said, with a fierce excitement, "I can take their beacons. Let them go back."

Laden with the extra beacons,

Baird strode on, and through the face-plate his eyes fixed on the Walker of Vail, just ahead.

One by one they left the beacons at the edge of the steep slope, where they would broadcast a steady danger-warning to the rockets of the big drop to come. When they set the last one down, Vail turned his Walker quickly.

"Let's get the hell back out of here, fast!"

Baird raised his Walker's metal arms, and grabbed. One massive arm clamped around Vail's machine. The other reached and tore out the long range communicantenna from Vail's helmet.

Vail's startled face stared at him from inches away, through his face-plate. "What the devil, Farrel—" His voice came muffledly.

Baird, with a finger of his left hand, switched off his communic. He said, "My name's not Farrel. It's Baird."

"Baird?" For a moment, Vail's face showed genuine puzzlement and rage. And then his expression changed. "Baird—"

"Remember the man you killed on Earth, Vail? Down there in Antarctica? His name was Baird too."

Vail suddenly made his Walker move, a tremendous thrashing of its legs and arms—but Baird had chosen his grip carefully, and held

him fast.

"Don't try it, Vail. I've got a grip where I can tear loose a plate and the wires behind it, and disable your Walker in a moment."

Vail stopped struggling, and the fear was strong on his face now. The threat was a terrible one. Without a Walker, in the terrific gravity-drag and atmospheric pressure of Jupiter . . .

He said thickly, "Listen, I don't know what someone's been telling you, but it's a lie. I was never in Antarctica, I—"

Baird said, "I was the other man in that house. The young one, that your partner thought he'd killed."

Vail cried on a rising note, "I didn't kill anyone. It was Reiman, not me! I swear—"

Baird said swiftly, "Reiman? That was your partner's name?"

"Yes. Reiman. Yes." Now Vail's speech came in a tumbling rush, his dilated eyes wild through the faceplate. "He's one of Sherriff's men too. He'd been hunting for Doctor John Baird, for years and years."

"How did you find us?" Baird demanded.

"He found you. Reiman. The Antarctic photo-survey—he got the idea to check it over and he found what might be a camouflaged house. He ordered me to

come along, that if we got a secret Sherriff had always wanted, we'd be big men in Outer Planet. I didn't dream it meant killing—"

Baird ignored the protestations. He said, "The secret—the papers of my father—you gave them to Sherriff?"

Vail's voice rose shrill. "There *wasn't* any secret! Nothing in the papers, nothing at all. We'd failed. Sherriff was furious about the whole thing. That's why he had both of us transferred to Gany-mede—that's why I'm on this God-forsaken world right now!"

THERE WAS a raging accent of truth in that last, Baird thought. But it upset all his preconceived notions. If his father's secret, the secret Sherriff had coveted for decades, had not been in his papers, then where was it? In his father's memory, only? Lost now, forever?

He tightened his mechanical grip. "Christ, don't!" Vail screamed. "If a plate tears loose and the pressure gets me—"

"Will you testify to everyone, that Sherriff sent you and Reiman on that errand?" Baird demanded.

"Yes—I'll do it!" cried Vail. "Just let me get back, away from this hellish planet, I'll talk my head off. Sherriff and Reiman were the ones got me here, damn them!"

"Listen, Vail. We're going back. I'll be behind you every step of the way. Once back to the rockets, you start talking right there and then—or I'll kill you before the others know what's happening."

"All right," panted Vail. "I said I'd do it. You can keep behind me."

Baird loosened his grip and swiftly turned his Walker to get behind the other man.

Not swiftly enough! Vail had been waiting. The moment the grip eased, his massive Walker's metal arms swung into motion, a whirling sidewise blow that struck Baird's Walker with a tremendous clanging.

Baird felt himself tottering at the edge of the steep slope, the gyro-stabilizers unable to correct in time. He knew with sickening certainty what awaited him, and what a fool he had been.

But, even as he toppled, Baird grabbed back with his own metal arms. His massive metal hands closed on Vail's Walker-arm, as Vail followed through on the blow. They toppled together, and went over the brink together.

The crash of their first impact almost stunned Baird. It was followed by the bang-bang of other jolts as the two Walkers tumbled down amid the rocks. The fall

seemed to be endless, to go on forever.

The fact that he was in the skinform harness inside saved Baird from anything but bruises. He found that his Walker lay at the bottom of the slope, its whole side staved open, and now he could hardly breathe as the terrific pressure of the cold Jovian atmosphere rushed into his armor.

He gasped, struggled. Every breath came with pain and the sulfurous fumes in the low-oxygen air was choking. He got the oxygen-flask out of its clamp and hung it swiftly into position around his neck.

He began to extricate himself from the Walker. His movements were slow, exhausting, as he now fought the gravity of the great planet with only his own strength.

Baird wormed out of the broken Walker. By a terrible effort, he managed to stand erect. Then he saw the other Walker, sprawled nearby, the whole metal shoulder of it torn open.

Vail's ghastly, terrified face looked at him through the faceplate. Weighted down by tons of lead, Baird managed to stumble to the other.

Vail whimpered, "We're done for. We can't go a hundred feet, without a Walker. We're going to die right here."

CHAPTER VIII

THE COLD CERTAINTY came to Baird that Vail spoke the truth, that they were indeed trapped by the inescapable. Right now, he found it difficult even to stand erect. The miles of atmosphere above pressed down, and the gravitation dragged down, and his whole body was so many times heavier that each small movement was a terrible effort. And they were two miles from Drop One base, with their communics broken.

The wild bawling of the thunder overhead seemed to mock Baird as he stood stricken and white-faced. Then a fierce reaction seized him. He would *not* die sordidly here in the mists, after all the way he had come. He would live, and he would pull Sherriff down.

He stooped, and by a terrible effort he dragged Vail out of his broken Walker. He got Vail's oxygen-flask out and hung it on his neck-strap.

"We're going back to Base," he said. "Come on."

"We can't!" Vail cried in agony. Tears of pain ran down his cheeks. "I can't take a step, and the drag is tearing my guts out—"

"You're coming," Baird said. "I'll help you. We've got to get up to the plateau."

His arm around Vail, half lifting and half dragging him, he started to climb the rocky slope. The distance was not great. Yet the terrific effort required, made the task seem futile.

The continuous flash and flare of lightning showed Baird the way. He called upon all his strength. It seemed to him now that he had never really pushed it to the limit before.

The task was a nightmare of impossibility. Scientists had long ago calculated that no unarmored man could walk far in the terrible drag of Jupiter, and that too long exposure to the drag and pressure would shatter the tissues of his body. It seemed certain to Baird that he would die in the effort.

The rim of the plateau came into view. He climbed on, dragging the moaning Vail, each step a titan effort. The power of the giant planet tried to pull him back down, and he fought it. Many times he set his heels in the rock, and gasped for breath, choking on the fumes. He kept his head down, to gulp the trickle of oxygen from the bottle under his chin.

They were on the plateau. But Vail, now, had given up all effort and lay, his face white and agone in the lightning glare.

Baird bent over him. "Vail,

you've got to try! No more climbing—we can make it now!"

The other man only moaned. An access of fury seized Baird and he shouted, a hoarse cry drowned by the thunder-roll.

"You're *not* going to stay behind and die! You're going with me, and tell about Sherriff!"

He dragged Vail erect and started off along the rim of the plateau. It was a grotesque progress, stumbling and staggering, the one man half supporting the other, who moved his legs convulsively and spasmodically.

The radar-beacons they had left became, to Baird's confused brain, a succession of milestones that were a hundred miles apart. It seemed to him that the never-ending thunder up there jeered and bawled at him, as Vail's weight became heavier and heavier on his arm.

They had passed the seventh beacon, and there was only one to go. But suddenly Vail slipped out of the support of his arm and lay upon the rock face downward, not moving.

Baird, stupefied by exhaustion, looked down at him. Then he bent and shook him, but Vail did not reply.

"Oh, no, you're not staying behind," Baird panted, and cursed Vail. "You're going to tell them."

He bent further, got his arms under Vail, and then gathered his waning strength. By the greatest physical effort of his life, Baird struggled up to his feet and got the limp weight onto his shoulders.

He thought at first that he was ended. The Jupiter-multiplied weight of Vail, loaded onto the magnified weight of his own body, threatened to crush his legs like strings. He rocked and swayed, leaned forward, and began a staggering half-run.

STEADY FLARES of light shone through the mists ahead, not dancing like the sky-flares but continuous. The rockets. The base. He shambled toward them. He fought the drag, as one would fight a man.

Strange figures loomed around him. It took Baird a moment to realize that they were Walkers, that their metal arms were reaching toward him, not to strike but to help. He saw startled faces behind the face-plates.

The mountainload of Vail's weight was lifted from his shoulders. A hard, cold metal Walker-arm angled around him beneath the arms, helping him toward the rocket. Things began to go very dark for Baird.

He woke in a bunk, with Carew looking down at him and Firmin,

the young medic of the party, punching and prodding his body.

Firmin babbled. "I tell you, by all the books he should be *dead*. But I can't find a single shattered bodywall, not even a dislocation—"

Baird said, "Listen. Vail—"

"Vail?" said Firmin. "*He's* dead, all right. And you should be. Carrying him, with no armor at all, no Walker. I can't understand it."

Baird felt an avalanche of disappointment overwhelm him. "Vail dead? But that means—"

It meant that his efforts had been for nothing, that Vail could never now be forced to tell the truth to all the world. That Sheriff would go on, unpunished—

No. There was another, beside Vail, who could tell. There was Reiman, Vail's partner in that crime on faraway Earth. Reiman could still be found, even though Vail was now beyond him.

"Take it easy," Carew said, turning stiffly to leave. "Stay in your bunk. We're going up in half an hour, anyway."

Firmin said, "So soon? We were supposed to run preliminary maps too, if we could."

"We can't," Carew told him. "Didn't you hear what's going on out there in the east?"

And now, as they listened, Baird

heard it too—not the thunder that still racked the tortured heavens without ceasing, but a lower, deeper growling that made the rocket quiver.

"That vulcanism out there," Carew said gravely, "is increasing its activity. I don't like it. My job was to drop the depot, make ready, and leave. We're leaving."

The Walkers came clumsily aboard. Hatches closed. Warning bells for blast-off rang as the weary, sagging men got out of their Walkers.

"My God, you still alive?" said Farsetti to Baird.

"I'm all right."

"All right? Trampling around on your feet, without a Walker. And now you sit there looking better than we do."

The tubes let go and the rocket blasted upward. But not fast, this time. Slowly, painfully, clawing its way out of Jupiter's grip on laboring jets of fire and force, the rocket won agonizingly up through the thunder-racked mists, to clear space.

The men did not get out of their bunks. They lay in a stupor. The blast-off on top of their Jovian stay had been too much.

Only by the time they roared down toward Ganymede Base did they drag themselves out. When they had landed, and trooped

wearily and shakily out of the rocket, they stopped and stared.

THEY HAD LEFT Base with a dozen big rockets towering up around it. But now there were a score more, so that the looming silvery towers seemed a gigantic metal forest, gleaming and sheening under the beating white glow of the great planet above.

"Sherriff's come!" said someone, and Baird's heart skipped a beat. "That means the big drop is right ahead."

"It isn't, for me," said another bitterly. "They want me to go back to Jupiter, they can shoot me and take me dead. No other way."

Sherriff here? To Baird's seething mind, that meant something else. It meant that he had only a few days, maybe only a few hours, left. If he didn't pull Sherriff down before the man made an historic conquest of Jupiter, he'd never be able to do so. For, if he succeeded in his life ambition, Sherriff would be too big for him or for anyone to reach.

Reiman was the key. He had to find Reiman, and fast. Threaten him, half-kill him if necessary, but make Reiman talk. He was the only one left now who could incriminate his master.

In the squad-hut, Shaner looked with a little awe at Baird. "They

told me what you did. Geez, I always knew you were tough—but carrying another man down there, without a Walker—”

“It wasn’t far, and I didn’t know what I was doing anyway,” Baird said. He asked, “Do you know a man named Reiman?”

“Reiman?” Shaner frowned. “There’s an executive officer named Reiman over at headquarters company. Why?”

Baird said earnestly, “Vail—the chap I was carrying—said Reiman was his friend. He said to find him.”

Shaner looked sympathetic. “Sure, I know how it is.”

Joy came into the squad-hut, his face excited as he hurried up to Baird and Shaner. He said, “Orderly came over from Hq. John Farrel is to report there to the old man.”

“You mean—to *Sherriff*?” said Shaner, unbelievably.

“That’s what. John Farrel, to report to the commander. What kind of a jam have you got into, Farrel?”

That was what Baird was wondering as he stood, stricken by the news. He might have expected it! They had him here on Ganymede where they wanted him. They had him here where Sherriff’s word was absolute law. They’d known all along who he was, or suspected

it—that Doctor Naramore had made that plain, on Earth. And now—

Shaner said, “Go ahead Farrel. Maybe it’s not so bad.”

Baird followed an orderly across the base. The cold thin air was rasping to his lungs. The vast bulk of Jupiter, a swollen immensity of cloudy light, was shifting down toward the horizon as the moon turned. The forest of great rockets stood up in black, stark silhouette against the planet they had been built to conquer.

Headquarters was the biggest of the prefab buildings, and the orderly led him into the biggest office in it. Then he stopped Baird, inside the door. “Wait.”

There were a half-dozen people in the office. Sherriff, sitting at a field desk, dominated them all. In the harsh light, Sherriff’s face looked gray and tired, with dark pouches under his eyes. The white at his temples seemed more pronounced.

His daughter, in slacks and jacket, sat in a corner watching her father with grave, anxious eyes. Willis and a younger man in the Outer Planet uniform stood at the side of the desk, and at the other side was Naramore. They were listening as Carew, his back to Baird, spoke.

“—and I earnestly recommend

postponing the big drop till we've observed this new volcanic activity," Carew was saying.

Sherriff said harshly, "It's been observed, from here on Ganymede, for years. That plateau is safe."

"It always *has* been safe," Carew said. "But I repeat, on the ground I saw definite evidence that the activity may reach the plateau. We may have to shift the base farther west, toward the mountains."

SHERRIF'S eyes shot smoldering fire from under his brows. "And how long would that take? More months of reconnaissance, of planning, of build-up? I'm not thirty, like you. I haven't *got* years to spare. The plateau is safe."

Carew said nothing more. Silently he turned and went out.

Baird's eyes, after that first survey of the faces, had not left Sherriff's. With his first sight of Naramore, the man who must know who he was, he had known what to expect. This would be the showdown.

The orderly pushed him forward. He walked to the desk and said stiffly, "John Farrel, reporting."

Sherriff looked at him. "Oh, yes. The man Carew and Firmin told us about." He seemed almost, in a tired way, trying to be pleasant. "You know Dr. Naramore, Com-

mander Willis, Officer Reiman — and my daughter Elda."

Reiman? That blond, tight-faced man beside Willis, the man with eyes as cold as space? Baird's temples began to pound. Reiman's voice, Reiman's footsteps, in a house where a man lay dying. Reiman saying, *You take the safety off the reactor—*

"If I only had a weapon," Baird thought, "*I could kill them all, right here, right now—*"

Elda Sherriff had come to her father's side and was speaking anxiously. "Dad, I think you should listen to Carew. If it's not safe—"

Sherriff exploded. "Damn it, you haven't any idea whether it's safe or not. You're still plotting with Naramore to keep me out of my own big drop. Forget it. I'm tough enough for it, and I'm going to lead it."

He looked grimly at Baird. "And speaking of toughness, it seems you're an outstanding example, Farrell."

Baird made no answer. What answer was there to make now? They were playing him like a fish on a line. He looked at Sherriff. He looked at Reiman, and his muscles tensed.

"Carew said you walked, carrying a man, without a Walker," Sherriff was saying. "And Dr. Fir-

min said it hadn't injured you in the least. That's quite a feat."

"It was only a few steps," Baird said. He didn't quite understand this approach.

"It's enough to prove you're good material for Jupiter," Sherriff said. "The big drop goes tomorrow. I can't order a man along who just came back. But if you go with us, you'll go as a headquarters runner-orderly. We can use a man like you in that job."

Baird felt dumfounded. He hadn't expected this. Was Sherriff playing with him? Or did they prefer to take him back down to Jupiter, where it would be easy to handle him, without so many witnesses?

His back hardened. That must be it. All right, he would play along with him. If he succeeded in what he planned tonight, the big drop wouldn't be *made*. Not by Sherriff and Reiman, anyway!

He said tonelessly, "I'm willing to go back to Jupiter with you."

"Good," rumbled Sherriff. "You'll get your instructions in the morning."

Baird turned and walked out. He thought, "So that's it! Take me with them on the big drop and do it neatly there. But it won't happen that way!"

This night would end his long quest, one way or another. If he

could get his hands on Reiman before morning, if he could give him his choice of death or telling the truth, the charges he could make would blow Ganymede wide open. With Reiman's testimony to back him up, he could make a noise here that would reach clear back to Earth.

Baird went away from Headquarters hut, but only until he was out of sight in the shadows. Then he slipped back, this time keeping in the rear of the huts and supply-dumps along the base street.

JUPITER WAS only a great segment of silver above the horizon now. The tall rockets cast a bewildering criss-cross of shadows. The cold was bitter, but cold he did not mind. No one saw him as he crept back to the Headquarters hut, and waited in the shadows by its side.

Reiman would come out, sooner or later. He would have to—there were no barracks in Headquarters. When he did, Baird thought, it would not be hard to jump him if he were alone. If Reiman were not alone, he'd have to get him aside on pretext of a last message from Vail—

A hard object prodded Baird's back, and a quiet voice said, "Turn slowly. Don't try to jump, and

don't make any sound."

Baird stiffened, and then as he felt the weapon muzzle removed from his back, he turned as slowly as he had been ordered. A man confronted him, his face a white blur in the shadows.

It was the face of Doctor Naramore.

"Listen, Baird," said Naramore. "I want to talk to you. The gun was only to make sure you didn't jump *me* when I came up behind you."

"You followed me?" Baird said, stating a fact, not a question.

"Yes. I wanted to talk to you in private. Then, when I saw you slip back, I realized I'd better take care of introducing myself."

There was no more doubt at all in Baird's mind. "Listen, *Baird*," Naramore had said.

Baird said, "How did you know me, at first?"

Naramore still held the gun. He said, "Those electro-physical tests you took when you signed up on Earth. Your tapes were passed up to me by the lab men—they couldn't understand them. I told them it was a mechanical error, that I'd run the tests on you again. And I did."

Baird did not understand that, but it did not matter. All that mattered was that he had failed.

"What are *you* getting from

Sherriff for it all, Naramore?" he asked. "The scientific secret that was stolen from my father—do you get a share of it?"

"No secret was stolen from your father, Baird," said Naramore gravely. "There was nothing written down in those papers to steal."

"But he *had* a secret," Baird said. "What happened to it? Where is it, then?"

Naramore said, "Yes, John Baird had a secret. The greatest in the world. But it wasn't a bit of paper, a formula, anything like that. It was a *man*."

He added, "You, Baird. You, yourself, are the secret."

CHAPTER IX

BAIRD STARED at the other man, taken by surprise, bewildered by the assertion.

"What do you mean, that *I'm* the secret?"

"You, your physical body, Baird," said Naramore. "You're different from other men, from all the men who ever lived. Haven't you ever suspected it? Didn't your father tell you?"

"Different? How?"

Naramore sighed. "I see he never told you. And all this time, you've never dreamed—incredible!"

He pocketed the gun. He put

his hand on Baird's arm, drew him away from the big metal hut, farther back into the shadows. And Baird, amazed and bewildered, went with him.

Naramore said, "Your father—is he dead? The way you spoke of him made me think—"

All the hot rage came up in Baird again. He said harshly, "You *know* he's dead. You must have known, when Sherriff's killers found us, and murdered him."

"*Sherriff's* killers?" Naramore sucked in his breath sharply. "Listen, boy. I didn't know John Baird had been murdered. But if he was, be sure of one thing. Sherriff never had it done. He's not that kind of man. I know."

Baird jeered bitterly. "Yes, you'd say that. You're his man, too. You'd help him, to find my father, to rob him of his secret—"

His words trailed off. That incredible assertion came back to dominate his mind. He looked at Naramore. "What did you mean—that my body was different from other men?"

Naramore said gravely, "You're the first outer-planet man."

"The first *outer-planet* man?"

"You're strong, aren't you, Baird? Stronger than other men? Tougher. Far more able to resist pressure, drag, shock of all kinds. Aren't you?"

"Yes," Baird said, slowly. "It seems that I am. But—"

Naramore interrupted. "You are, in fact, best of all men fitted to endure the conditions of the great outer planets, the cold, the drag of great gravitation, the tremendous atmospheric pressures. What do you think made you that way?"

"I grew up like that," Baird said. "Down in the Antarctic, from my earliest memory—it's tough there, and it made me tough."

Naramore shook his head. "No environment could make a man's body *that* strong. Your body is different. The tissues in it, the cells, are different from other men's. A hidden, subtle difference—but one that makes you able to walk the outer planets where other men cannot!"

"You mean—I'm some sort of a mutation?"

"No," Naramore denied. "You were born a normal infant, the son of John Baird. I remember you quite well, as a baby—"

He was silent for a moment, thinking. "That was twenty years ago. Sherriff had just started Outer Planet Bureau, was laying his long range plans for conquest of the outer planets. People said it could never be done, the pressures and the drag would be too much. Sherriff believed it could.

"Dr. John Baird, your father, was then head of the Space Medicine Division of Outer Planet. I was a junior medical assistant, a youngster hardly older than you are now. I knew your father well. And I knew, when John Baird evolved his idea of outer-planet man.

"Your father believed that a human being, *if young enough*, could be physiologically changed to fit him to endure outer-planet conditions. It was a matter of cytology. If the tissues of the body could be influenced to grow stronger, more tough and rigid than is normal, the man with that body would at maturity be able to withstand those conditions. When John Baird proposed that, Sherriff was excited. None of *us* would benefit by such a process, even if it was discovered. But young children could be influenced by it, would grow stronger than normal, would in coming years form a band of men and women able to conquer the outer worlds."

Baird exclaimed, "But who would want their children growing up abnormally, who would let it be done—?"

NARAMORE SAID, "Not abnormally. They wouldn't be different from ordinary people, just stronger. And who wouldn't

want their children to be strong?"

He continued. "Sherriff's life ambition was to conquer and colonize the outer worlds. Such a process would, by the time the first landings were made, give him a band of colonists who could *live* on those worlds. A great, long-range dream—"

"And my father used the process on me?" Baird said.

"Yes. Your mother was dead, you were a two-year old baby. John Baird was sure of the formula he'd evolved, sure it would make you far stronger than any man. He injected the chemical into your body."

Naramore shook his head. "Then—tragedy. The chemical was too powerful, and set up a violent reaction. It seemed you were going to die. John Baird was horrified, conscience-stricken. It seemed to him he had killed his own son.

"You didn't die. But John Baird said the formula was too deadly dangerous ever to use again. He refused, he said, to *let* it be used. And when Sherriff pressed him, John Baird disappeared. When we looked for him, no one knew where he was. He'd left no traces. He meant never to be found."

"But his formula had worked on me?" Baird said, unbelievably.

"Yes. It had worked." Nara-

more said. "The electro-physical tests we ran on you proved it. Your body is different in its tissues than other mens'. The connective tissues of the cells are semi-solid matrices, to use the physiological term. It means that your body-walls and sheathings are as tough as cartilage. It worked!

"But it seems obvious now that John Baird, horrified by the fact that the process had nearly killed you, was determined the formula would never be used again. No one else knew it. When he disappeared, it went with him."

Baird's mind, stunned by the revelation, was racing back into those long years in the Antarctic wilds.

"He said once that he didn't *dare* go back to the outer world, that it would mean the deaths of many," he told Naramore.

Naramore nodded. "He was afraid the formula would be used again."

Baird's brain was rocking from what he had heard. Wonderingly, he looked down at his own hands, his body. So that was the source of his strength, his hardness, his ability to endure! Not the grim Antarctic had bred that strength into him—his father's scientific skill had given him that more-than-human toughness.

Memories flooded back on him,

and all was so clear now. The way that he had been able to stand the polar cold, his immunity to shocks and falls, the way in which he had remained unaffected by the gruelling ordeal of space-flight, above all, the way in which his body had triumphed even over the gravity-drag and pressures of Jupiter. No wonder Sherriff had wanted that secret!

He said grimly, "And all those years, Sherriff tried to find my father?"

"Yes. He offered a big reward to anyone in the Bureau who could find John Baird. He went on with his own plans to conquer Jupiter by means of machines, by the Walkers. But he still clung to the dream of outer-planet man in the future, men who'd be able to exploit the worlds he was going to open."

"And for that dream, for his ambitions, he sent Reiman and Vail to kill us!" Baird said savagely.

Naramore seized his arm. "No, Baird! Reiman did that strictly on his own, and Sherriff doesn't even know your father was murdered. Reiman came back and said he'd found you and your father dead of starvation in your Antarctic hideout—that he'd taken your father's papers, and had destroyed your home and your bodies.

Sherriff raged at him for that. And the formula was not in the papers!"

"Oh, no," said Baird. "You're covering for Sherriff. Of course you would. You know what I'm going to do, to him and Reiman."

"If Reiman committed murder, the law can deal with him," Naramore said urgently. "But Sherriff had none of it! And—he's a sick man. You saw him in there. Too many space-trips, too many years of toil on his big dream. I've warned him he can't safely land on Jupiter, but he won't listen."

"Are you asking my sympathy for the man who killed my father?" Baird demanded harshly.

Naramore stepped back. "You won't listen. You have an obsession, a hatred you won't let go of."

HE WAS SILENT a moment. Then he said, "I can understand and sympathize with you, Baird. And because you obviously did not want to be known, I've never told anyone what *I* found out about you from those tests. I thought I'd wait and see what you were doing."

Baird looked at him. "You mean—Sherriff and Reiman don't suspect who I am?"

"Sherriff doesn't. Why would he? You're supposed to be dead.

The fact that you walked a little on Jupiter without a Walker is something an unusually strong man might do. No, he doesn't dream you're his first outer-planer man. But Reiman—I don't know. He seemed suspicious when he heard of Vail's death. I saw him watching you closely in there. He may have recognized you, in spite of that stubble of beard."

And Naramore added soberly, "If what you say is true, he's a murderer. He'd murder again, to cover up. Don't give him a chance. Don't go to Jupiter, Baird."

"I'm going," said Baird, with all the tension built up by the months and miles of his quest. "I'll settle with Reiman and Sherriff."

Naramore said, "Listen, Baird—I'm going on that drop. And I'm Sherriff's friend. I know he's innocent of that crime. Don't force me to protect him against *you*."

And Naramore turned sharply away and left Baird standing there in the shadows.

After a moment, Baird turned. He walked, between the towering rockets, but not toward the barracks hut. In this hour, with his whole past revealed so suddenly, he could not stand the barracks.

He went on through the shadows, and the thin cold wind whispered to him. He left the base, and there was nothing ahead

but the lonely, lifeless crags of Ganymede, stark and brooding under the starry sky.

Baird stopped upon a ridge, and looked back at the silvery forest of the rockets. The icy wind strengthened, and he did not feel it. It moaned mournfully through the lifeless gorges. Above, amid the hosts of stars, Saturn shone resplendent.

His imagination suddenly leaped. "*Outer-planet man!*" He, the first. The first of all men to be free of these cold and terrible outer worlds. Other men must creep about them painfully, in protective machines, but he could stride these hostile worlds a conqueror. He, if he wanted, could stand beneath Saturn's rings, could look upon the moons of Uranus, could—

He forced that sudden leaping vision from his mind. All that could come later, if ever. But not now. Now there was a dead man lying under the ice of far-away Earth, and there was justice to be done.

A savage triumph swept Baird. He would go with them on the big drop. And there, on the giant planet, he would be the strongest of them all. The strength that his father had given him long ago would be the nemesis of those who had killed John Baird.

He stood long, and the stars

paled, and the glowing white curve of an enormous disk pushed up above the horizon. And now, from down in the Base, a silver snarling sound came up to Baird, echoing thinly, repeated shrilly.

The alarms were calling, for the big drop, for the conquest of a world.

CHAPTER X

FLAME AND FUME from a thousand bursting volcanoes screamed up and tore with fiery fingers at the misty sky. And the riven mists, already sheeted with lightning, roared back in heightened, thunderous storm-fury, the tortured sky battling the upshoot-ing fires from below.

What place had tiny humans here on Jupiter, when the great planet's endless internecine wars were raging?

To Baird, even inside his Walker, the stupendous clamor was numbing. From where he stood on the rim of the plateau, he could dimly see the fires below and the storms above doing battle out there. Vast wings of dark smoke rushed by him. Lightning danced continuously now in the upper air, and as it lanced through the fog he glimpsed the red-hot lava that was creeping ever nearer the plateau.

He turned. Past him beat the

red glow, weirdly illuminating the frantic activity on the plateau. An activity of pigmies, it seemed, contrasted with what was going on out there to the east.

The dozens of rockets towered from the ground, shuddering slightly with each new diastrophic tremor. Constantly, lightning washed out the red light and played a cruel brilliance on the silvery hulks, on the frenzied movement of Walkers and tracs and trailers. They had been unloading for hours, but the pace of the toil had not slackened.

Baird swung his Walker, his eyes tensely searching the wild scene. He was desperate. He had lost his man. The Walker that bore Reiman's number was nowhere to be seen.

"He *must* be somewhere here," Baird thought. "But if he does suspect me, he could be hiding—"

He had meant not to lose sight of Reiman. Reiman must talk, as Vail had talked—but so that all could hear him, so that all the world could know what Sherriff had done.

But it had not been possible, in the urgent hours after landing, to keep track. Baird had had his own work to do, in these frantic hours. The vulcanism had indeed grown worse, worse even than Carew had feared. The rockets must be un-

loaded and got off before stronger tremors brought them crashing down.

And now, in this wild hurly-burly, Reiman had slipped away from him. Baird fiercely sent his Walker striding forward into the scene. He wanted to leave the clumsy machine, to do what he alone of men could do here, to walk on his own feet and search for the man he must find. But to do so would be to betray his identity unmistakably to Sherriff, before he was ready.

He was searching amid the huddling, grotesque groups of Walkers, when one of them came veering toward him.

The sweating, haggard face of Willis, vice-commander, looked through the face-plate at him. Willis' voice came, raw with anger.

"Farrel, where the hell have you been? You're supposed to be an orderly, ready at any time—not wandering off!"

Baird could not explain that he had been searching for Reiman. He remained silent.

Another tremor, coinciding with massive triple bursts of thunder from the swirling sky, rocked both men's Walkers. The towering rocket near them swayed majestically.

"Go to the Command Hut, to Sherriff!" Willis shouted at him. "Tell him he's got to come out

and see the situation for himself. We can't maintain operations here—the rockets have got to get out of this fast!”

“I'll tell him,” said Baird. Of a sudden a new hope stirred in him. Maybe that was where Reimold was, in Command Hut right now.

“If he came out and saw for himself, he'd realize the jam we're in,” Willis said. “Why the devil *doesn't* he come out? Tell him I respectfully demand his immediate presence on the scene.”

Baird strode away in his Walker toward Command Hut, the big low metal building that he had helped erect on the first drop. The wide door automatically swung open, and once inside the lock-vestibule he climbed out of the Walker.

He didn't need the hand-rods that were strung for support along the wall and through the inner door, to the interior of the hut. He went through, and then he stopped.

Sherriff was in here. And Elda, and Doctor Naramore. But it was Sherriff who held his eyes.

HE SAT at a field-desk and his hands were palm-down on its surface, and he looked straight ahead. But though his head was erect, his face was falling apart. The skin was sagging over the

bones, the once stony face was a skullshead now. The eyes stared blearily at Baird.

Elda Sherriff had tears in her eyes, and as she and Naramore sat beside Sherriff, unable themselves to remain standing long, they were speaking to him and he was not listening at all.

“Message from Vice-Commander Willis,” Baird said, and Sherriff continued to look blearily, vacantly, at him.

“Yes?” he said thickly.

Baird repeated the message. Sherriff gave no sign he heard.

But Elda Sherriff did. “Come out?” she cried. “He *can't* come out. Can't you see he's dying by inches, just sitting here? He shouldn't have come, he's got to go back—”

“She's right,” Naramore said to Sherriff. “You've got to listen. You can't stay here—”

Sherriff interrupted. The thick, slurred voice seemed to come from far back in his throat.

“It took me a lifetime to get to Jupiter. I'm staying.”

“But you heard what Willis says!” cried Naramore. “None of us can stay! We've got to pull out, come back and build another base elsewhere—”

A dim fire flashed in the sunken eyes. “No. You and Elda go back—shouldn't have come. But I

stay."

Sherriff looked directly at Baird. "Tell Willis this. He's to unload the tracs and trailers, all the essential equipment. Then send the rockets back to Ganymede. We'll load everything on the trac-trailers and caravan westward toward the mountains, out of this area."

"But *you* can't lead that caravan!" Naramore said. "You'll go back with the rockets. I insist—"

Sherriff ignored him. He said, to Baird, "*Tell* him!"

The urgency in the command sent Baird hurrying back out. He found Willis just getting out of his Walker in the lock.

Willis, his face dripping, listened to the message. "No, it's crazy!" he burst. "I'm going to see him myself."

He went into the office, hanging to the hand-rail, and Baird followed.

"We can't caravan west, it's too risky with no proper maps," Willis protested. "We must re-load what we can, and take off."

Sherriff looked at him. Then he stiffly reached into his field-desk and took out a wicked little blast-pistol. He laid it on the desk.

He said, "Listen, Willis. I've been twenty years getting here. Now I'm here, and I'm commanding. I'm giving orders, and if anyone tries to contravene them—"

Willis made an angry gesture. "All right, I'll pass your orders on. But don't blame me if the men won't obey them!" He went out.

Baird turned to follow, desperate to renew his search for Reiman, but Sherriff's voice stopped him.

"Farrel, wait a minute."

Baird turned. Sherriff's eyes watched him with a strange light in them.

"Farrel, when you went out in a hurry just now, you walked like a man would walk on Earth. How did you do that?"

Baird did not answer, and there was for a moment no sound except the never-ending roll of thunder battering at the metal roof.

"I'll tell you how he did it!"

Reiman's voice! Baird swung fast, and it was too late. Reiman stood behind him, one hand hanging on the rail, and the other hand holding a blast-pistol steady.

"He did it," said Reiman, "the same way he got back safe after he killed Vail."

"What are you talking about?"

REIMAN LOOKED at Baird, and it seemed to Baird that though there was hatred in his eyes, there was more, much more, of fear.

"I went along the rim, to find

out just what *had* happened to Vail," said Reiman, his gun never wavering. "I found out. His Walker had its communic-antenna torn out. It, and Farrel's, lay on the slope, two miles from here."

"Two miles?" exclaimed Sherriff. "No man could walk that far, unless he were—"

He was suddenly silent, staring at Baird with a strange surmise in his eyes.

Naramore said, "Yes. It's John Baird's son. He's not dead, he's here."

Baird said, "But my father's dead. My father's dead, Sherriff, and your men killed him."

Sherriff turned his gaze to Reiman. His thick voice accused, "You said you found them both already dead."

Reiman's sullen voice answered from behind Baird. "You wanted John Baird's papers, didn't you? It wasn't my fault that the formula wasn't in them. I was getting them for you. And it wasn't my fault old Baird put up a fight and got killed. You don't think after that I'd leave this one behind as a witness, do you?"

Baird turned. Reiman's face was white and set, his lips curled back a little. He was looking at Baird, not at Sherriff, as he said,

"The hell with you, Sherriff. He got Vail, but he's not getting

me."

The blast-gun in his hand raised a trifle. Baird bunched himself for the hopeless lunge, and even before he lunged, a crackling blast sounded.

Reiman's face went black and seared, and he toppled with the unused gun falling from his hand.

Slowly, unable to believe, Baird turned. The blast-gun in Sherriff's hand was still pointing to where Reiman had stood.

"I owed you that, Baird," said Sherriff harshly. "And even if I hadn't, I wouldn't have let him kill you. Not *you*. Not the first outer-planet man."

The others watched, transfixed. Baird went up to Sherriff, and he was shaking with anger that had found no outlet.

"So you didn't order my father killed, after all," said Baird. "It was your ambitions that killed him. Do you think I'm grateful to you?"

Sherriff seemed to have great difficulty in speaking. He formed his words with care, but they came out slurred.

"You, personally, I don't give a damn about, Baird. But you're the first man of the kind of men I've dreamed of. Your father's secret—scientists can reconstruct it from studying you. You're important."

Baird was shaking. "Not to you, Sherriff. Not to you and your plans. I'm not helping Outer Planet, not in any way."

"You lost your father, and you hate me and you hate Outer Planet," said Sherriff. "All right. I've lost my life, Baird. I'm going to die right here. But what I've started is going to go on."

He turned his head, with great effort. "Naramore. Get Willis in here again." Naramore went out.

And Sherriff said to Baird, "I'm putting you second in command under Willis. *You* can lead a caravan west, if anyone can. You can go without a Walker, find the way, get them there."

"I won't do it!" cried Baird.

"You won't do it for me," said Sherriff. "Nor for Outer Planet. I know that. But for the men who are risking their lives out there right now? You have no score against *them*, Baird."

Baird tried to find words of raging rejection, and could not find them. He felt trapped, frustrated, beaten.

Willis came in and Sherriff gave him the order. Willis stared. "You mean, he can get around without a Walker? He *could* help find a way west—but it'll still be a gamble—"

"Get onto it," Sherriff said. His head was sagging, and he did not look up at them. His voice was a

throaty whisper now.

Baird hesitated, looking at Sherriff and at the girl who with Naramore was bending over him.

He felt, somehow, that he must say something, but no words would come. The long, bitter quest for vengeance—it had come only to this, and there was nothing at all to say.

He went out. The last essential equipment had been unloaded from the rockets and was being piled aboard the low, heavy trac-trailers—the prefab hut-sections, the reactors, the food-concentrates, the vital machines.

THUNDER STILL raged vainly at the red glow that crept and crept from the east, and now the rock plateau was shuddering continuously as the men worked. Baird, without any Walker, strode out of the base, past the rockets, up to the first rock ridge to the west.

The hot winds tore past him, splitting the mist again and again. He peered, his eyes watering from the fumes. Far to the west loomed the icy ranges, and he thought he could see a way the tracs might go. If he went ahead of them, light of foot, unencumbered by a Walker he *could* guide them—

He went back down to the base and into Command Hut. Sherriff

still sat at the field-desk, but his head was on it now, between his hands. Elda Sherriff looked at Baird, her eyes glimmering.

He said, "Your father—"

"He's dead. He was dying, all the time he sat there."

Outside, alarms began to scream thinly above the thunder. The rockets were ready to go.

"His body?" Baird said. "Do you want us to take it with us? Or will you—"

"Leave him there," she told him. "They say this whole plateau is doomed. Leave him."

He helped her out into the lock, where her Walker stood ready. He said, for the first time, "I'm sorry."

She looked at him. "It's not your fault. But—I'm glad you are. If you come through this, we'll meet again."

In her Walker, she went out and joined the last Walkers going up the ramps into the rockets. The hatches closed.

The rockets, one by one, went skyward with frantic haste on their rising columns of flame. Those who were left, busy in their Walkers around the machines, did not even look up. The trac-caravan was already urgently forming up.

"Hurry!" cried Willis' voice. "The lava will wash this whole plateau, in an hour!"

The tracs started rumbling on their way, and the men in the Walkers strode clumsily along beside them toward the west.

Baird led the way striding free. Through the thunder-rocked mists, up the easiest slope to the low spot in the ridge.

He wondered as he went, if he would walk other planets this way some day, if he would walk Saturn, Uranus and the cold and unimaginable barrens of Neptune

He *could*. First of all men, the great outer worlds could be his. An excitement grew in him, and the long months, the long, bitter quest, began to fade from his mind.

On the low ridge, hours later, they looked back. Where the plateau had been, a dull red glow of lava burned in the swirling mists.

"Sherriff's world," thought Baird. "Yes. It will always be his world, now."

He looked west, but the mists hid the farther ranges from him now. Yet he knew the way, he had seen. He would lead them—and maybe would lead too on other wild worlds that still awaited the challenge of man.

He stepped down the ridge, into the lightning-lit fogs, and slowly the long line of tracs and machines and men went down into the mist after him.

FIELD TRIP

by

Darius John Granger

An archaeology course on Mars promised to be a dull affair for Marty Stebbs. But that was before he started puttering with a space wreck!

THE cold Martian wind, which had driven most of the sand-burrowing animals of the planet's equatorial belt to shelter soon after sunset, could be heard keening outside the cave. The sound of the wind and the ancient weathered walls of the cave, deep reds and gleaming silvers, were romantic things. They spoke of far away, undreamed of places to the dozen young archaeology students from the Earth University at Marsport, four hundred miles away, who now suddenly found themselves in the midst of the Martian wilderness..

But the winds spoke only of trouble to one of the students. He sat with a mournful look on his usually cheerful face, sat hunched knees to chest close to the mouth of the cave, where it was very cold. The fire cast a pale red

glow on his back and the side of his face. His eyes tried—and failed—to pierce the night darkness outside the cave.

"Stebbs!" Professor Friendly called. "Stebbs, weren't you listening?"

Marty Stebbs' voice floated back from the cave entrance.

"What? Oh yes, of course. Of course I was listening."

A few of the other students laughed softly as Professor Friendly said, "In that case you'll have no trouble giving me a summary of what I said about the Teotin culture, as manifest in the areas of the cavern as yet unexplored by this party."

"Well, actually —" Marty began in confusion.

"You were *not* paying attention," Professor Friendly accused softly, patiently, almost apologet-



Illustrated by Kelly Freas

ically. "It is a free country and a free university, Stebbs. Why, may I ask, did you select archaeology as your field of interest?"

"Oh, I don't know," admitted Marty at once. "It sounded—well, exciting. It sounded like adventure. You know, the call of far places and strange things. Instead, all we do is go crawling over cavern walls with little chisels and toothbrushes. You call that adventure?"

"There is more adventure out there in the darkness where you have been staring?" Professor Friendly demanded.

"I'm worried, that's all. The *Lazy Lady* is out there in all that wind. She's liable to rip apart."

Some of the students laughed again, but Professor Friendly shook his white-maned head as he got up to toss another compressed log on the fire. "The *Lazy Lady*," Pro -

fessor Friendly declared, "has been out there fifty some years, my boy. That is too long for it still to be a functioning space ship and not long enough for it to be an archaeological relic. Caught between a machine age Scylla and an antiquarian's Charybdis, you might say."

"There's nothing wrong with the *Lazy Lady* that I can't fix!" Marty said with some heat. "All I need is another couple of hours. You think I'm kidding. I'll bet I have the *Lazy Lady* up for her first test run in fifty years tomorrow morning."

"But what for?" one of the students asked.

"Because she's fifty years old and abandoned. Because she's salvage bait. Because if I get her to work she'll be mine and at least I'll be able to have some fun flying her around before the seminar expedition ship returns here in a week to pick us up."

"You like this jerry-rigging of abandoned space wrecks better than archaeology?" Professor Friendly asked.

Marty shrugged. "Oh, archaeology's all right, I guess," he said magnanimously. "For those who like it. But I—"

shriek of its jet brakes rising through the wind like a banshee.

"Now who," one of the students—a North American named Gil Winters—wanted to know, "would be coming way out here in the middle of the night, unless he was an archaeologist?"

"There are no other expeditions in this area," Professor Friendly said, taking Winters' gambit seriously.

"Hey, the *Lazy Lady*!" Marty cried. "They might bump her in the darkness. If the wind doesn't knock the *Lady* off her riggings, they will."

"He's actually going out there," Winters said in amazement. "Old forty below Stebbs."

"It isn't that cold," Marty called as he started outside.

"According to Earthian astronomers, it's even colder."

"Yeah?" Marty said, bristling. "According to weathermen at Marsport, the astronomers weren't measuring surface temperatures on the Martian equator, they were measuring medium altitude temperatures and didn't know it. That makes quite a difference. But I got to go now."

As the twenty year old youngster ducked outside the cave, Professor Friendly shook his head and smiled. "Maybe there's some hope for Stebbs, after all. Now, about the Teotin's desire to . . ."

JUST then there were the unmistakable sounds of a Martian sand sled outside, the high

NICETIES of temperature didn't mean much. It was very cold out there in the Martian night, but as much more beautiful than a winter night and a winter sky on Earth, as they are more beautiful than a summer night and a summer sky. The cold dark air knifed into Marty Stebbs almost painfully, but the velvet black sky, the magnificent sky, was agleam with stars and with the twin pale ghost-bands of the Milky way.

Professor Friendly can have his caves, Marty thought. Give me the night sky on a clear night with—

Then he remembered why he had come outside. Fifty yards from the cave entrance was what the others had referred to as the "carcass" of the *Lazy Lady*. Marty had borne their jibes with a patience born of conviction and self confidence. The *Lazy Lady* would fly again. He, Marty Stebbs, would make her fly. That being the case, what did the jibes of the others matter?

Half-carried by the wind, Marty sprinted through the darkness toward where the dark bulk of the obsolescent spaceship was silhouetted against the starry sky. Sure enough, between it and himself Marty could see the final flaring glow of the space sled's brakes.

"Hello out there!" he called. There was no answer, and Marty decided the wind had swept up his voice and carried it away. He cup-

ped his hands to his mouth and was about to shout again, more lustily, when a voice so close that it made him stop dead in his tracks said:

"Please don't call again. They'll hear you."

It was a woman's voice. Marty could suddenly sense her nearness—and something else. The words she spoke seemed controlled enough, but there was an edge of panic in her voice.

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"I can't hear you—the wind. Can we go somewhere? You can't just be wandering around out here. There must be—"

"A cave," Marty said in a loud voice which he thought she would hear over the wind.

"Yes, we—a cave." One of the words was lost in the wind. It might have been "expected" Marty thought with some surprise.

"Come on, then." He reached out until he felt her arm, an almost shapeless bundle wrapped in furs and insulining. "But you're not alone, miss. Are you?"

"Please. The cave. We'll talk there."

Without another word, Marty led her toward the cave entrance. The *Lazy Lady* could wait. The *Lazy Lady* was adventure but so, Marty thought, was this.

“COME close to the fire, young lady,” Professor Friendly said. “Would you like some more soup?”

“No. No thank you. I wasn’t wandering out there long. Can the fire be seen from outside?”

“Not unless you’re looking for it specifically.” Gil Winters said. “There’s a sharp bend in the cave wall, as you may have noticed.” Archaeology had been forgotten on the woman’s entrance to the cave. Even Professor Friendly, a septegenarian, had seemed bemused.

She was very beautiful. They had all watched in silence while she took off the heavy furs and the thin layer of insulining. Under them she wore a jumper and fur boots. She was a tall girl with long dark hair and an oval face which, Gil Winters had whispered to Marty, could have won her a video contract back on Earth. She was, they decided, about twenty-five years old—or five years older than most of the boys on the expeditionary seminar.

“I’m glad we can’t be seen,” the girl said. “By the way, this is the Teotin cave, isn’t it?”

Professor Friendly beamed on her. “You are a student of archaeology?”

“No, but—”

“This is the Teotin cave,” Marty said. “Why?”

Instead of answering, the girl

walked closer to the bend in the cave and stood there for a long time listening. “I don’t hear anything,” she said finally.

Marty went over to her. “You didn’t come alone,” he said. “You were in a sand sled with someone. Who were your companions?”

At first she didn’t answer him. Slowly, in twos and threes, Professor Friendly and the other students left the fire and joined Marty and the girl. She looked at all of them as they came, studying their faces.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said. “I am sorry. I didn’t realize. I couldn’t know that you—”

“What’s the matter now?” Marty wanted to know.

“That you’re an old man and a bunch of boys. I—I can still get out if you want.”

“You’re hiding from something,” Gil Winters suggested.

Marty shook his head. “From someone. The people in the sled?”

The girl nodded. “I’m afraid so. Tell me, are you looking for the gold too?”

“Gold? Marty demanded. “Did you say gold?”

“Of course. The legendary Teotin treasure. It’s why we’re here. You see, my brother found the map originally, but he met with an accident in further exploration of the area last year. At least at the time I thought it was an ac-

cident. I — I don't know now. I don't think it was."

"What do you mean?" Marty asked.

"My brother's friends. They tried to kill him, I know that now. Miraculously, he managed to escape, but he'll be an invalid for a long time. He didn't know I took his map and came here. I thought it would be better if I didn't tell him that his old friends had invited me along on a second try at the gold. But they didn't want me, I realize that now. They wanted Tommy's map. It was the only passport I needed. I was a fool."

"They're out there now?" Marty asked.

"Yes. I'm very much afraid they want to kill me."

"To kill you!" Gil Winters cried.

"I overheard them talking about my brother Tommy. How they planned the accident to kill him and have the treasure for themselves. That's attempted murder you know and now that they know I know, since they tried once they can try again and I—"

HER voice wavered, faltered. Suddenly Marty found it necessary to support her weight as she slumped toward him. "I—I'm sorry," she said after a time. Marty could feel the animal warmth of her body. He felt the blood rushing to his temples; he thought Gil

Winters was leering at him.

He had to talk and so blurted, "What's there to be sorry about?"

"Because they're desperate for two reasons. First, they don't want me to share the treasure with them." As she spoke, color returned to her face. Marty went on holding her and she realized that she did not need his support any longer. Self-consciously, he released her. Gil Winters leered again, then winked at Marty as the girl went on. "Second, I know now what they did to my brother. They're desperate. In the morning they'll find this cave, if they don't sooner. They—they're liable to do anything—for me and for the gold."

"Young lady," Professor Friendly said. "There is one thing I wish you to know. As an authority on Teotin culture, I can safely and positively say, there is no Teotin treasure."

"But the map!"

"Once, once long ago there was a treasure. But I am afraid the legend has persisted longer than it should have. You see, written on the walls of these caverns further down is a record of the treasure. But it was written eons ago, and—"

"Gold," the girl said. "It's pure gold. Nothing happens to pure gold, even in millions of years."

"If it had been pure gold then I assure you," Professor Friendly said, "archaeologists alone would not be entering the Teotin caves. But, you see my dear, when the Teotin's enemies destroyed themselves and the Teotins in a war of mutual destruction, the treasure—which had been stored up to pay the cost of war—was made highly radioactive. Gold, as you may know, has a very short half life. I am afraid that after all this time there would be no gold left, not even gold that you could measure with a micrometer."

"But, but—"

"Instead, my dear," Professor Friendly went on with ruthless scientific detachment, "you will find only solid bars of pure—mercury."

"Quicksilver! But that's hardly worth anything."

"Unless," Gil Winter said, laughingly, "you wanted to start a thermometer factory."

"It is a boon to archaeologists," Professor Friendly said, "that the gold has become mercury. Otherwise, the precious relics of a dead Martian civilization would be trampled to dust beneath the boots of a million prospectors. So you see—"

The girl's eyes were abrim with tears. Marty said. "I don't know how you could talk about archae-

ology at a time like this. Can't you see how she—"

"It's only gold," Professor Friendly said.

"Oh, it isn't that, Professor. I don't really care about the gold. It's Tommy. I wanted to find it for him."

"And these companions of yours," the professor asked dryly. "Did they want to find it for Tommy too?"

"Not at all. They tried to kill him. They—"

"—were the sort of prospectors I had in mind," Professor Friendly finished for her.

GIL Winters nodded. In twos and threes again, and this time with the girl following them, the students drifted back from the cave entrance toward the fire. Beyond its glow the cave was soon lost in shadowy darkness, but Marty knew that the underground passages narrowed and continued down into the bowels of Mars for many miles, eventually reaching the surface again at several other points, which as yet, archaeologists had never uncovered. Here in these caverns the Teotin civilization had fought its final losing battles against extinction.

"—is your name, my dear?" Professor Friendly was asking the girl. Marty shook his head in some

surprise. He had actually gone into a mild funk over an archaeological concept. Perhaps, he thought for the first time, there was adventure in archaeology too.

"Alice," the girl said. "It's Alice Chalmers."

"Alice," the professor repeated, nodding. One by one he introduced the students, but it was apparent that Alice Chalmers, who smiled with mechanical politeness as each boy was introduced, kept more than a weather eye on the bend in the cave wall which hid its entrance.

"And the one who found you," the professor said with a grin, "is our celestial mechanic, Marty Stebbs."

Marty offered his hand, but Alice's head suddenly darted around and she cried: "I heard something."

"One of the boys," Professor Friendly said.

"No. Listen."

There was a noise, all right. Outside the cave. It was a slight scraping at first, then the sound of boot shod feet on stone, then a voice:

"It's *the* cave, I tell you. The Teotin cave. Lucky? Man, I'm telling you."

And another voice, softer but somehow hard. "If you're right, I guess we can just let Alice freeze out there. No sense looking for her

if we've found the cave. She'll never survive the night."

"You must of been born with a horseshoe in your mouth, Mac. Am I glad I teamed up with you!" the first man said. He had a loud, booming voice — and probably, Marty found himself thinking, not much between the ears.

"Be quiet, you fool! Don't you see the glow. It's a fire. A couple of archaeologists, I figure."

"Arch—which?"

"They look for relics. This place is a Mecca for them here on Mars. If they don't get in our way, we won't get in theirs. Want to say hello to them? Just let me do the talking."

"Whatever you say, Mac."

"Hide me," Alice said in a tight, anxious whisper. "You've got to hide me."

Professor Friendly nodded and said in a barely audible voice, "You, Winters. You, Beasley. Take her back. The first passage. We'll follow when we can. Quickly."

Gil Winters nodded and took Alice's arm. Marty felt a vague sense of disappointment because he had not been selected. He watched as Gil and the second boy, George Beasley, began to lead Alice beyond the fire. Then, before he could pause for breath, the two men made their appearance from the mouth of the cave. Their fur-

red shortcoats were opened, revealing insulated tunics and trousers. About their waists blasters were belted. Between them, Marty realized with a sinking feeling, the members of the expedition did not have so much as a pea shooter. There had been no need for firearms because there was no dangerous fauna on Mars. Unless, Marty thought grimly, you counted the kind that walked upright on two legs

"Well, hello," the man with the softer voice, the one called Mac, said. "We sure didn't expect to find anyone in here. You're archaeologists, I figure. We —"

JUST then there was the sound of someone stumbling beyond the glow of firelight. Rock was dislodged and there was an unmistakable sob — in a girl's voice.

"Well, if they ain't got co-eds," the bigger of the two newcomers said.

"You fool, that was Alice," Mac told him. "Watch the professor and the others." He smiled at Professor Friendly and flung a "no time to explain now" over his shoulder, then headed for the other side of the fire and disappeared beyond it.

His big companion stood as if carved from stone, with one large hand on the butt of his holstered blaster. Presently Marty heard an-

other sob from Alice, then some muted talking. Moments later, the man called Mac returned with Gil Winters, Beasley, and Alice.

"Beasley tripped," Gil Winters said shamefacedly, "and sprawled all over the girl."

"Aw, I didn't mean it," Beasley said.

Professor Friendly walked up to Mac and said in a loud, unexpectedly calm voice, "I want you to know that this is the twenty-first century. You cannot possibly get away with —"

"My dear sir," Mac said, "I'm not trying to get away with anything. The girl, our relative, has been mentally ill and —"

"Yeah, sure," Gil Winters told him.

"— and I'm sorry if she has caused you any trouble or invented some fanciful story. You see, she is under psychological care."

"Then you will have no objection," the professor said, "if we all contact the proper medical authorities on your sand sled radio. All of us together?"

"Now see here," Mac said indignantly. "We couldn't —"

"Then permit me to say why you could not," Professor Friendly shouted. Despite the grim situation, the professor's reaction came as a pleasant surprise to Marty Stebbs, who never would have expected

anything of the kind from the old man. "You could not possibly do it because everything you have said was a lie. Because the girl is not under mental treatment. Because you want the map which is in her possession. Because then, when she is of no further use to you —"

"Shut up," the bigger of the two men said. "We don't have to listen, do we, Mac?"

Mac shook his head slowly. "You listen to this professor. We want that map. If you just let us take the girl we're willing to forget we bumped into you. Otherwise—"

"Winters!" Professor Friendly cried. "Take the girl back —"

Mac's hand blurred at his face and all at once the professor sat down on the hard rock of the cavern floor. There were two worms of blood extending from his nostrils to his upper lip and a red smear across his mouth.

When Marty tore his eyes away from the professor, who was helped to his feet by Beasley, Mac was holding a blaster in his hand. "All right, Stan," he shouted, "we'll do it their way. Get the girl while I watch these —"

He never finished the sentence. Hardly realizing what he was doing, hardly thinking of the blaster in the man's hand, Marty stooped low as if to help Beasley with the pro-

fessor, then plunged his hand into the edge of the fire and produced a flaming brand. With a savage shout he held the unlit end of the brand and swung it full in Stan's face.

The big man screamed and clawed at his face. His hair was smouldering. Still swinging the brand, Marty went for the second man, who retreated swiftly. With another shout, Marty hurled the brand.

"Let's get out of here!" he cried.

Neither the boys nor the professor needed any prompting. In a few moments they had overtaken Gil Winters and Alice in the depths of the cavern. Winters was carrying a flashlight.

"They're following us," someone said.

"If they catch us," another boy cried, "they'll — kill us."

It sounded so unexpectedly improbable that Marty could hardly believe the words had any meaning. But he could hear the two armed men pounding across the cavern floor behind them— and that grim message needed no words.

"They don't know the way," Professor Friendly panted. "All they can do is follow us. But we—"

"We can get lost in here as well as they can," Marty said. "We can get lost and starve to death before we find a way out of these caverns."

"You could, my boy," Professor Friendly said. "But not the rest of us. You have not been studying your archaeology lesson, yes?"

"Yes," Marty said bleakly.

Then they all ran on in silence.

THEY trotted doggedly forward for hours. Marty had long since given up trying to keep track of where they were. All the cross-passages and sudden turns had left him hopelessly confused, and in the light of Gil Winters' flash one cavern looked very much like another.

The flashlight was a problem. Without it, they would become lost in moments. With it, their pursuers could follow. They had no choice, of course, and every time they called a halt of a few seconds to regain their breath, they could hear the pounding footsteps behind them.

Once the professor said, "I was hoping we could lose them, but apparently the light — yet we need the light —"

And then they were running again. Later — if there was a later — Marty would admit he had learned his lesson. If he had saved their lives with quick thinking and daring action in the cavern entrance, the professor had saved their lives a dozen times over with his intricately-detailed knowledge of the Teotin caverns. For if they

lost their way they would starve to death before they reached the surface again. And if they happened to double back and reveal themselves to Mac and Stan . . .

" . . . an entrance," the professor was saying, "not a quarter of a mile from where we came in."

"But we've been trotting in here for hours," Marty said.

"Around and around, my boy. When they are sufficiently far behind us —"

"But it's cold," Gil Winters groaned. "It's too cold out there. We couldn't survive without our insuliners, but we left them in the first cavern."

"We'll survive," Marty said promptly, happily. "Don't forget the *Lazy Lady*. She's not ready to fly yet, but I've got her heating system and just about everything else rigged up already. All we have to do is run a few hundred yards to the *Lazy Lady* and —"

"Later, tell us later," Professor Friendly panted. "But I must say now I have learned new respect for celestial mechanics."

"Just plain mechanics," Marty said. "My hobby is glorified grease-monkeying, that's all."

"Archaeology and grease-monkeying," the professor said as they trotted along. "I am beginning to like the combination, especially since it can show us the way out."

As it turned out, the mutual backslapping was not only premature, but almost fatal. In his enthusiasm, the professor had missed the dim opening to a connecting passage. When they tried to double back they almost collided with Mac and Stan. There was a brief struggle, but blasters prevailed in the face of numbers. The weapons roared twice and blasted rock came roaring down from the unseen walls.

In the confusion, Gil Winters lost his flashlight. They plunged on in darkness, their pace slackened to a slow walk as the professor felt along the left wall of the cavern for the passageway they had missed. But their pursuers, with no light to follow, could only move at a crawl too.

"Here," Professor Friendly said. "It is here."

Speaking was a mistake. A blaster roared again and more rock tumbled down about their ears.

"Is everyone all right?" the professor demanded.

A quick chorus of affirmative answers spurred them on, but now the blasters roared steadily behind them as their pursuers fired wildly. Blasted rock struck Beasley's head, felling him. They could do nothing for the bruise and the deep laceration now. They could only carry him and hope they reached the surface soon.

"There!" Gil Winters cried.

Ahead was dim light. Marty began running with a wild cry. He had not realized it would be dawn by the time they reached the surface again but the pale watery dawn light of Mars shined weakly.

"Keep to the sides," Marty ordered. "Otherwise we'll be silhouetted against the light."

FLATTENING themselves against the jagged, naked rocks of the cavern walls, then running a few quick steps, then flattening themselves again, they fled from the blaster fire toward the cave mouth.

Would it be the right place? Marty did not know, but did know that it had better be. For at dawn in the Martian equatorial zone the temperature would be in the neighborhood of zero degrees, Fahrenheit and the wind would chase itself across the flat Martian tundra at better than seventy miles an hour. They would need the shelter of the *Lazy Lady's* battered but sealed interior — and in a hurry.

Suddenly, the pale blue Martian sky was above them. And ahead of them, bathed in pale yellow rays the early morning Martian sun, was the ungainly bulk of the *Lazy Lady*.

They sprinted across the tundra and Professor Friendly cried: "Can

you lock her after we're inside?"

"No," Marty groaned, "the lock was one of the things I didn't have a chance to work on."

"Then our flight has been for nothing because they can force their way in and —"

"No time to explain now," Marty said. "Just pile in!"

They ran up the battered, buckled ramp and tumbled inside the ancient spaceship. Marty was the last one in and slammed the un-lockable door, then sped to the front of the ship and flung over his shoulder at the professor, "You're sure they'd get hopelessly lost if they tried to find another way out?"

"Without Alice's map — positive!"

"That's all I wanted to know." And Marty sat down at the controls of a cumbersome-looking device which stuck its snout through a slit similar to the opening in an astronomical observatory, except that this slit was thoroughly sealed. "Here they come!" he shouted, and touched a control button.

Through the viewport, Mac and Stan could be seen fleeing back inside the cave, and barely in time. A raw blast of energy followed on their heels, searing the Martian tundra and liquifying the rocks of the cave mouth to slag. The slag flowed sluggishly, glowing a

dull red. When the flowing stopped, the entrance was completely sealed.

"A ship-sized blaster!" one of the boys said in awe. "I never saw one of them working before."

"Neither did I," Marty said happily, "which is why I put this one in working order in my spare time last week. Nice, huh?"

"Nice?" said Professor Friendly. "It's beautiful. It is as lovely as the Teotin cave paintings. It is —"

At that moment Alice came over and planted a kiss on the professor's cheek. "For the archaeologist, who showed us the way out," she said, and then went over to a blushing Marty Stebbs and repeated the process. "And for a grease monkey who completed the job."

Beaming, the professor said, "Those two men are trapped inside now. If they're foolish enough to try to find their way back, I guarantee you they will starve to death before help can reach them. That being the case, we can inform the authorities in Marsport of what has happened at our leisure. So I suggest putting it to a vote: do we return at once to Marsport in the sand sled or do we wait until Marty Stebbs finishes repairing the *Lazy Lady*?"

The vote was unanimous.

Marty smiled and got to work on the control panel.

The professor was smiling too.



Integer Barrier



“GOD made the integers; all else is Man's handiwork,” said Leopold Kronecker the irascible arithmetician. Kronecker was not exaggerating. Before his time, mathematics was a hodge-podge of formal symbolism. But all the integrations and differentiations meant not a thing if they were not related to the most intimate of math experiences — counting.

Kronecker put solid foundations under the shaky structure of formal manipulation. The integers, one,

two, three . . . are our immediate *a priori* acquaintance with mathematical reasoning, whether we are civilized Americans or barbarous primitive cannibals.

No matter how modern mathematical philosophers, Peano and Russell included, attempt to reach past the integers, to grasp for the substance of “numberness”, the barrier of the integers refuses to budge. When you count you do one of the most sophisticated acts in the world . . .



"I suppose this means dinner will be late again"

Starting a war would be easy for the two alien worlds. But neither wanted to assume the blame. So they searched for a pawn and found—

The Man Without A Planet

by

Adam Chase

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

THE EARTHMAN showed an empty inside-out pocket to the waiter, who was not an Earthman, and said. "There, you see. All the pockets. All empty." He spoke Linganian almost like a native, as if he had spent some years of his life on Lingan. He was a big gaunt man, but not old. His jumper and leggings were threadbare but he looked strong.

"You have no money?" the waiter asked, looking at the empty glasses which stood on the small round sidewalk table.

"I'm cleaned out," the Earthman said.

"You knew that before you ordered your drinks?"

"Yes."

"And you still ordered them?"

"Yes. I was thirsty."

"Do all Earthmen do that?"

"I wouldn't know."

The waiter raised his voice and

shouted so that the other customers of the sidewalk restuarant could hear: "You are a cheap Earthman bum!" he cried. "I will not call the police. You are beneath my scorn. You are what is to be expected from an Earthman."

The tall gaunt Earthman did not seem to mind this calling down. He listened in silence, shrugged and stood up. A well-placed boot from the waiter propelled him toward the door, and he accepted that stolidly too. He had had much to drink all the hot afternoon, but he was not drunk. Lately, he was never drunk. He went outside into the bright blue Linganian sunlight and the crowded street. When he left the awning of the outdoor restaurant, the sun hit him, blue and parching, like a blast furnace.

He heard the other customers talking. They made no bones about



it: they did not like Earthmen. There were several blue-skinned Linganians and two or three Charkos from nearby Chark, a small planet of a double-star system, a planet with a white dazzling sun by day and a somber red sun by night and no darkness at all.

He shrugged. It wasn't his affair. He had been born an Earthman but he did not consider himself an Earthman now. Ten years, he thought. Ten years. He had been young then. He had left Earth with a Galactic League policing army to settle a dispute which had erupted into warfare between the Charkos and the Linganians. Now, ten years later, Chark and Lingan had forgot their differences and had banded together in hatred of the policing power, assigned by the Galactic League, Earth. There were very few Earthmen here on Lingan, he knew, and none at all on more violent Chark. And all the Earthmen on Lingan were hated.

It wasn't his affair, he told himself again. Why should it be his affair? There was a girl on Earth. Funny, he thought. Ten years and Lord knows how many drinks and how much wandering all over the face of Lingan and now, sometimes, when I'm very tired or very drunk or when I don't give a damn, it's hard to remember her name.

Because she had been unfaithful — she, whose name hardly mattered now — he had forsaken his heritage. He was an Expatriate now, a man without a world. He was five thousand light years from Earth and dead broke.

THE HEAT got to him after a while. It sapped his strength and he knew he was out of condition. In the old days he could have marched with a full field pack in heat like this. It wouldn't have bothered him. Now, though, it left him with a weak feeling and a strong desire for a tall cool drink and some shade and enough money in his pocket, Linganian money, not to have to worry about where his next meal was coming from. Five thousand light years from Earth, he went on, dwelling on it, pitying himself, with no one to care. Then he thought: come off it, old boy. Come off it Craig old boy. Craig Peterson, he thought bitterly, the all-Earth failure Craig Peterson, who had no further existence on Earth and was hated elsewhere because Earthmen with their strength and experience had drawn Galactic League policing assignments wherever the trouble was really bad, as it had been here ten years ago between Chark and Lingan . . .

"Earthman!"

The voice was a loud whisper

behind him. He turned slowly. He was very curious. He had nothing now. Absolutely nothing. You did not turn away from the unknown when you had nothing. The unknown could never hurt you when you had nothing, and it might help.

Behind him, matching him stride for stride, was a green-skinned, crest-topped huge-chested and incredibly spindle-limbed Charko from Chark. "What do you want?" Craig Peterson asked.

"I couldn't help overhearing, at the restaurant."

"Oh?" Craig Peterson said, and kept walking. He hurried his pace, but the Charko kept up with him.

"I know what it is like to be penniless on an alien planet. We of Chark are great traders, as the men of Earth are. On a smaller, more local scale, of course." Somehow, the Charko's attitude seemed patronizing. Craig did not like the green-skinned man and did not know why, aside from the patronizing attitude. He wished the Charko would go away. He said:

"I'm not interested."

"Are you going back to Earth?"

"Hell, no," Craig said, almost savagely.

"You have no money?"

"I have no money."

"You are also an expatriate?"

"You seem to know everything. Why ask me?"

"You *are* an expatriate?"

"All right. Yeah, I'm an expatriate. Now leave me alone. Get lost."

"But you still need money. If not to return to Earth, then to eat. You have been living from hand to mouth a long time, haven't you?"

The street was crowded with Linganians. It was a busy section of Desert Hills City, loud with horn-blatting, with Linganian voices, bright with Linganian garments, heavily peopled. As he passed a small dim alleyway, Craig stopped in his tracks, then yanked the Charko into the alley with him.

"Now," he said. "Now tell me. If you don't tell me what you want, I'm going to hurt you. You Charko's fear physical pain more than any race —"

"Take your hands off me," the green-skinned Charko said. Under the circumstances and for a Charko, he seemed remarkably composed, as if — somehow — he knew the big Earthman would not hurt him.

"Not until you tell me—"

"That is easy, Earthman. I offer you enough money to keep you here on Ligan, living in style, for the rest of your life."

OUTSIDE the dim alley, a Ligan couple walked by arm in arm. The man said something and

the woman, who evidently thought it was funny, giggled. Then they merged with the crowd.

"Well?" the Charko said. Craig had let him go but the pipe-stem-limbed green-skinned man made no move to break from the alley.

"You'll pay me a fortune — to do what?"

"One small job which you can accomplish in a matter of minutes."

"I'm listening."

The Charko smiled: the smile said his mission was assuredly accomplished. Craig scowled and watched him, but the Charko said nothing.

"I'm listening," Craig said again.

"Tomorrow," the Charko said quietly. "The Charko Ambassador to Lingan will arrive here in Desert Hills City for a speech. He will be well-guarded, but the guards will be less wary of an Earthman. Do you know why that is so?"

"Sure," Craig said promptly. "We're hated. We're so hated out here that we've got to keep our noses clean. So it can be assumed we'll keep out of trouble entirely."

"Exactly," the Charko said.

"What about the Charko Ambassador to Lingan?"

The Charko smiled. "I want you to kill him," he said.

"But you — you're from Chark!"

"For a hundred and fifty thou-

sand Linganian credits, Earthman."

"But why, why do you want—"

"Because Chark is a trading planet without markets. Because Chark and Lingan both are poor. Because the best thing that ever happened to us was the Earth policing force ten years ago. It is simple arithmetic, my friend. The Earth forces spent seventeen billion Linganian credits here during the occupation and two billion Charko silvers on Charko. We need that money. We need another occupation."

"You mean you want an excuse for Chark and Lingan to declare war on each other again, and —"

"Precisely. And have Earth come, occupy us, police us, and save us from economic ruin. Does it sound strange?"

Craig said, "It sounds crazy. In the first place, you don't have to kill the ambassador tomorrow. What the hell, you could use some other incident. Any incident. In the second place, why select an Earthman who you don't even know —"

"If I answer your questions, will you consider my offer seriously?"

"Answer them."

"Wait. Are you hungry?"

"I'm hungry," Craig admitted.

The Charko smiled. It was not a nice smile. It was a smile of the mouth only, a wolf smile. "I know

a restaurant down the street that really is a restaurant," the Charko said. Craig walked there with him.

THEY HAD Linganian desert cock, under glass, in a wine sauce. They had wild desert grain and hot-from-the-oven pop-overs and two big bottles of rich red wine. They had a brandied dessert and the Charko even offered Craig an expensive-looking Earth cigar. Craig felt physically satisfied for the first time in weeks. He had not realized that his stomach, until now, had always been empty or almost empty. He had lost much weight and he needed a meal like that. He needed a lot more like it.

"You remember why we are here?" the Charko asked.

"Yeah."

"Now let me answer your questions. It has to be the way we have planned it. The Ambassador is expendable. Someone must be. Do you know how many Earthmen there are here on Lingan?"

"Not many."

"Two or three hundred is all. Most of them are businessmen or employed by trading firms. You're not. You are unemployed, destitute and — we hope — desperate."

"I'm not that desperate."

"Think a moment. You kill the Ambassador. Chark declares war on Lingan. You —"

"Why does it have to be an Earthman who does the dirty work?"

"Because otherwise Earth will be reluctant. Earth has done much policing for the Galactic League lately. The turn would fall to some other, poorer planet, unless Earth had a reputation to save. Earth knows she is not liked across the length and breadth of the galaxy. A policeman never is, even a reluctant policeman. Thus, my friend, if an Earthman were responsible for plunging Chark and Lingan into war — if an Earthman supposedly in the pay of the Linganian government assassinated the Charko Ambassador on Linganian soil — Earth would then feel obliged to volunteer as policing power. You see?"

"Oh, that's great," Craig said, sipping the last of his wine, relishing the expensive cigar and now smiling bitterly. "That's wonderful. You mean I'm to get caught?"

"But of course. You will spend some months in jail. You will be forgotten, released, free to spend your money as you wish . . ."

"How do I know that's what will happen?"

"You don't *know* anything, but you're hardly in a position to demand safeguards beyond my word."

"Your word means nothing to me. You're a Charko."

"Perhaps I deserved that," the Charko said, unoffended. "If I were to give you half the money in advance, to put away somewhere, as you wish —"

"You're not serious."

"I assure you, I'm perfectly serious. Our people need that war. I have drawn the assignment to start it and to bring Earth forces here to police, to save us economically."

"A hundred and fifty thousand credits," Craig said out loud.

"And half in advance. Another cigar, Earthman?"

"No, No thanks." It still seemed incredible to Craig. If he did it — and at the moment he did not think he would — it might well work out as the Charko expected it to. Earth *would* feel obliged to volunteer as policing power if the war broke out as the Charko had outlined. It would cost Earth several billion dollars — and put Craig Peterson on easy street for life.

"You are sure?"

"I'm sure."

The Charko paid the bill and stood up. He left a liberal tip on the table and walked outside with Craig Peterson. "Here," he said, handing the Earthman a stiff white card. "My business card. Should you change your mind before the day is over, please contact me."

"I'm telling you I won't."

"You realize that leaves me in an awkward position. I have told you our plans."

"It wasn't my idea."

"Nevertheless, you know them."

Craig Peterson shrugged.

"Knowing them and not joining us, you cannot live."

Three words. You cannot live. Out of context they would seem ridiculous, melodramatic, something for grade B video shows. But the Charko was perfectly serious. He had gambled on Craig Peterson because Craig Peterson had seemed the ideal man for the job. His gamble had not paid off — and now Craig Peterson must die. They looked at each other, the man of Chark and the man of Earth, both on alien soil, on the soil of Lingan. They looked at each other and understood each other fully.

"You meant that," Craig Peterson said.

"You know I did. It had to be you. You said no. You cannot be permitted to live. You will change your mind?"

Instead of answering, Craig Peterson hit the Charko in the face and ran.

THE CROWDS on the streets of Desert Hills City hardly tried to stop him. He ran a block and a few half-hearted pursuers ran

after him. He went another block and he barely heard their shouts behind him. He went a third block, rounded a corner and slowed to a quick walk.

The Charko would have to kill him now, he told himself again. It was important to know that. His life meant absolutely nothing to the Charko. He was less than a pawn. The Charko would have to kill him — but had to find him first. On crowded Lingan, in a big city like Desert Hills, he would not be easy to find.

You could find an Earthman anywhere on Lingan, of course. You couldn't miss an Earthman. Earthmen were rare. But for a little money one could have himself disguised, the skin dyed, the eyes changed, the hair

One could be temporarily Lingan or a Charko — for a price.

Craig Peterson was broke.

He smiled and thought: that's it, Peterson, old boy. You'll have to go to work like anyone else. The thought amused him: he had not held a steady job for almost ten years, since the army of occupation.

He turned left on Prince Feston Street and went up two blocks to Broadway, then across town quickly to Summit Drive. The long walk under the hot blue sun winded him, drained his strength. He was panting and felt the first signs of heat exhaustion when he reached the

entrance of the Intergalactic Employment Service. Good old I. E. S., he thought. An alien resident's friend in need. That, he knew, was the theory of I.E.S. It would find jobs, here on Lingan or anywhere in the galaxy, for unemployed resident aliens.

That was the theory. But when he went inside Craig Peterson learned that the theory and the practice were light years apart. For the Lingan branch of I. E. S. was staffed entirely by Linganians. They had jobs for Linganians and some for Charkos. They had jobs for Pukas from the other side of the dust cloud separating Lingan's sun from Ophiuchus. They had jobs for Serlas and Koweews. They had jobs for Dordunas from Deneb's fifth planet. But they had no jobs for Earthmen. That was the way it was, although they were subtle. There was nothing Craig Peterson could do about it. He remained there for a moment and watched the denizens of a dozen galactic worlds sign their employment papers. Then he got out of there.

An hour later, on the hot street, he thought he was being followed. He began to run in the fierce mid-day heat. Even for native Linganians, running was now unthinkable. They stopped to stare at him. He slowed to a rapid walk. He turned around. A Charko and a

Linganian were behind him, all right. Following through the crowd.

He remembered the alley. The alley was ideal. It was either the alley or a fight here in the open. And he couldn't afford that, not when everyone would be against him. He walked swiftly, wondering why the Charko and the Linganian did not simply blast him dead.

He decided they did not because they still hoped he would join them.

Ten minutes later, panting and dizzy from the heat, he reached the alleyway and went inside. They would follow him, he knew. They would be armed. He ran to the back of the alley and there found, in a pile of other refuse, a length of wood he could wield easily with one hand. With it he returned to the front of the alley.

The Charko and the Linganian were just now entering. He knew at once he must concentrate all his efforts on the Linganian. For, despite its two suns, Chark is a cold world, far colder than Earth. The Charko would be more affected by the heat than Craig was, but the Linganian would be affected by it less. He must watch the Linganian.

THEY CAME in together, black silhouettes against the fierce

blue daylight glare. There would be a moment, Craig knew, in which their eyes grew accustomed to the sudden dimness. One moment only —

He swung the length of wood, swung it as he had swung a baseball bat on Earth, an age ago. He heard a sound like a ripe melon being struck and as he heard it there was a flash of raw orange energy. He had hit the Charko just as the Charko had fired his blaster.

"You fool!" the Linganian cried. "Your countryman wanted him alive."

Craig swung the club again, but the Linganian ducked and closed with him. They struggled there in the dim alley over the still form of the Charko, and slowly Craig was forced back. The Linganian was strong, was fresher than his antagonist, and more used to the heat. Craig knew it was only a matter of time until the Linganian overpowered him, unless he could bring the club to bear again. But the Linganian held his right wrist and forced his right arm up and over his head and he could get no leverage at all to swing the club.

Instead he relaxed suddenly and let the Linganian fall toward him. He clinched for a moment with the alien and because his life depended on it brought his knee up brutally and the fight was over. He ran from the alley —

Into the arms of a Linganian policeman.

"All right, Earthman. All right," the policeman said. "What are you running about?"

"It's nothing," Craig said. "It's nothing at all."

"Nothing at all," Craig said, knowing it sounded ridiculous, knowing the policeman did not believe him, knowing the policeman would look for himself in a moment.

Just then the Linganian staggered from the alley, looked at Craig and at the policeman and said, "It's 'all right, officer. Just a small misunderstanding between friends."

"Friends, eh?"

"Truly," said the injured Linganian. "Friends."

"Well, if you have no complaint to make —"

The policeman nodded and dispersed the crowd. "No hard feelings?" the Linganian said.

"No hard feelings? But you —"

"In the alley is a dead man. You killed him. I saw you kill him."

"That was self defense. You know damn well it was self defense."

"Yes? And who would ever believe you? The point is, Earthman, you are one of us now. You must be one of us. Is that understood?"

Craig said nothing.

"Tomorrow morning, early, see

Logor Vatt in his office. Logor Vatt was the Charko who first contacted you. Don't you see you have no choice? You have no money. You cannot get a job here on Lingan to earn any money. If you steal you will doubtless be apprehended. We no longer have to seek you out and kill you. In the eyes of the law you would be a murderer. Who would believe a 'murderer?'"

Craig remained silent. The Linganian laughed and said; "Don't forget, see Logor Vatt early tomorrow. And try nothing foolish. It is now no longer necessary to pay you anything in advance for if you fail us in any way —" the Linganian jerked a thumb toward what was in the alley.

Instead of answering, Craig turned and walked into the crowd.

He walked all afternoon and into the evening. He had no place to go, no place to eat or to sleep and absolutely no money. He merely wanted to think. Thinking was cheap. You could always think. And yet, somehow, thinking was often the most difficult thing in the world to do — properly.

The late afternoon rain — it always rained in the late afternoon on Lingan's hottest days — came suddenly and unexpectedly, drenching Craig Peterson with tepid water which steamed as it pelted

down on him. Afterwards it was cooler for perhaps half an hour, but then the fierce heat returned, and hardly abated when night fell. Night found Craig Peterson in a park. The parks were legion, he thought, for no good bums like him. Suddenly, all at once, it was that. His pride had been washed out of him, as if the pelting rain had washed it out. He was left only with a bitter sense of failure. Night in a park, on a bench, a bench for no good bums . . .

He slept.

The morning was fiercely hot, glaringly blue. He was very hungry, but there would be no food. He got off the bench. He began to walk and the further he walked the hungrier he became. Now he had to keep moving. He did not want to think. Thinking was all right yesterday, but today was different. Today was hunger and thirst and the heat and the knowledge that the Charko ambassador was arriving, a knowledge gleaned from every street-corner poster and every excited crowd and every temporary grandstand along Broadway and Summit Drive and another knowledge, a knowledge of a hundred and fifty thousand credits.

He reached into his pocket. He had not meant to do so. It was an unconscious act, but an act nevertheless. He found Logor Vatt's

card there.

He walked to Logor Vatt's office and the first thing he had there was a good breakfast. It was waiting for him as if Logor Vatt had been sure he would arrive and knew he would want it.

THE BLASTER was very heavy in the belt of his leggings. It felt awkward and uncomfortable and since it was many years since he had used a blaster, he wondered if he would be accurate with it at any considerable distance. He looked at Logor Vatt on his left and the Langanian, Par Tostas, on his right. He would have to be accurate. His life depended on it.

They stood in the crowd at the end of Summit Drive, with the whole of Desert Hill City spread out before them like a relief map. The crowd was many thousands of people, mostly Langanians. The crowd was excited because a final peace treaty was being signed between Chark and Langan, although hostilities had been ended for ten years. The crowd had been there for hours now, and so had Craig Peterson. With Logor Vatt and Par Tostas, he had worked his way forward through the mob until now he stood almost at its van, near the bandstand from which the Charko Ambassador would make his speech. It would be a fine speech, all the people in the crowd

were saying. It had to be a fine speech. Both planets had waited ten years for it —

And for another war, Craig Peterson thought. For they were about to be plunged into another war which again would involve Earth as it had involved Earth before. Earth would come out of the policing action, Craig Peterson knew, a few billion dollars poorer and with a worsened reputation. It was the reputation which mattered. Earth — facing a hostile galaxy. Because Earth had done something wrong? No, he thought. Because Earth was envied. Because Earth had spread out across the galaxy faster than the other civilized worlds, and because Earth's explorers had come to stay, to carve new worlds for themselves on the galactic frontier on uninhabited planets, to spread Earth culture from Ophiuchus to Saggitarius and beyond. . . .

It was a glorious tradition to be a part of, a wonderful history for a planet and its people. . . .

And he did not belong.

Somehow, he had gone wrong. It wasn't Earth. Earth went on with its billions of people. It was Craig Peterson who had gone sour. And wasted ten years.

Wasted

He wondered. He was thinking right now. He could sense it. An expatriate does not think. Think-

ing is the worst thing an expatriate can do. Right thinking or wrong thinking or any kind of thinking at all. But he was thinking right now. The ten years had not been wasted, he told himself. I'm here. I'm needed here.

He smiled. He was needed, sure. But what the hell could he do?

Could he do? What did he *want* to do? Lumps for Earth and easy street for Craig Peterson, a hundred and fifty thousand Langanian credits worth of easy street. Didn't they go hand in hand now? That was thinking too.

It was wrong thinking, he told himself.

The sun was very bright and very blue. He wondered if he would ever see the sun of Earth again, then tried to banish the sentimental thought at once. What did sentiment matter — in the face of cold cash? And besides, his life might depend on it. Couldn't Earth take care of itself?

In mid-afternoon the Ambassador came. A convoy of jetcars roared up the hill at the top of Summit Drive in the green and silver colors of Chark. The people watched and shouted and got out the green and silver bunting for Chark and the red, white and black for Langan. You could not see the green and silver cars very well in the bright blue sunlight when they passed before the Charko

flags, but you saw them very well against the Linganian flags.

THE AMBASSADOR stepped from his car. He was very close, and Craig Peterson did not like that. Had he not been so close, fate might have determined the outcome. It was easier that way. It was much easier for an expatriate if he let fate, or the weather, or anything else which he believed he could not control because he wanted to believe he could not control it, decide his future. Now, though, Craig Peterson's future was entirely in the hands of Craig Peterson.

The Chark Ambassador left his car and walked toward the bandstand, a small green man resplendent in the robes of state. He passed the special stands reserved for the diplomatic corps, and there was even a small box in the rear with the red, white and blue of Earth and two figures in it whose faces Craig Peterson could not make out at this distance. They were Earthmen, he knew. Earthmen a long way from home . . .

"Now!" Par Tostas said.

Ligor Vatt nudged him and nodded. "You have a perfect shot now. You couldn't miss, Earthman!"

The Ambassador was directly in front of the bandstand, standing there while video cameramen dollied toward him. He was less than

a hundred feet away.

"Now!" Par Tostas said again.

Craig Peterson eased the blaster from his belt. All the flags were bright in the sunlight and the white of Earth's flag, because the sunlight was blue, looked pale blue. Still, it was a lovely flag. It was a beautiful flag.

Craig Peterson raised the blaster. Someone nearby screamed. Then, abruptly, as if he knew Craig Peterson's mind better than the Earthman knew it himself, Par Tostas went for his own weapon.

Ligor Vatt tried to stop him, but the Linganian said: "It's obvious he won't do it!"

Craig Peterson smiled grimly. It had not been obvious to him. It still wasn't. Nothing was obvious now, beyond the immediate need to defend himself. For Par Tostas had drawn his blaster and held it low beneath his cape. "You fire on the Ambassador now," he said, "or I'll kill you."

The Earthman swung around with his blaster and jarred Par Tostas with his shoulder. Surprised, the Linganian dropped his own weapon. As he bent to retrieve it, Craig Peterson kicked him in the head.

All this had happened so swiftly that the crowd around them would still need several seconds to realize what had happened. Par Tostas shuddered and tried to climb to

his feet, then lay still. Craig whirled with his blaster and Logor Vatt said, quite calmly.

"Very well, We will do it your way." He raised his voice to cry: "Police! Police —"

Craig Peterson hit him and ran. He plunged into the crowd and through it, fighting arms and legs and the weight of bodies. There were shouts and the heavy pounding of boots behind him and voices yelling for him to halt. He went on and wondered if these were his final moments before death. It hardly mattered now. He was serenely, unexpectedly happy. He was doing this not for himself. At the moment he didn't matter. He was doing it for Earth. He was not an expatriate now. Even if he died, he was an Earthman again.

When he was halfway to the bandstand, the first of the police reached him. The Langanian officer was stocky and powerful and he brought Craig Peterson down and rolled over and over with him but the Earthman struck with fists and knees and freed himself and was running again.

The second policeman fired his blaster and the Earthman felt his left arm go suddenly, painlessly dead. He fell as an after effect of the blaster's power clawed himself upright again, found a face in the way, mouth opened and screaming, and stiff-armed it out of his

path and kept going. There were other faces and other forms, dimly seen, remembered as in a nightmare, but he fought through them. He dragged himself the final few steps and staggered to the railing of the diplomatic corps stands and then up over the railing.

"Over here!" a voice cried to him in English and he staggered in that direction. Hands hauled him up over the barrier and then there were voices, voices demanding him in Langanian and voices, in English, saying he was now under diplomatic protection of the Earth government until the proper government officials learned what was going on and translator voices translating for both sides.

Then there was nothing for a time, and after that there was a meal eaten slowly because it was so good and he wanted to savor all of it. And still later the antiseptic whiteness of a hospital room . . .

"Can you talk now, Peterson? You were raving deliriously. Like you were out of your mind."

"I was out of my mind, I guess."

"You're safe here. This is the dispensary of the Earth embassy. You can talk. You were saying some mighty wild things."

"I was out of my mind, all right," Craig Peterson said happily. "I was out of my mind for ten years."

"Can you prove some of those

things you said? About a war which was going to be started so Earth could pick up the bill and —"

"If a Linganian named Par Tos-tas is still alive, I can prove it. And a Charko called Logor Vatt

...."

As it turned out, they were alive and Craig Peterson proved his story with their confessions.

Then Craig Peterson returned to Earth.

THE END

Universal Astronomy

THE EXCITEMENT of the forthcoming satellite which will wing its way so near and yet so far around the Earth, the furor over guided missiles, ballistic missiles and rockets, is masking astronomical discovery. It is a peculiar thing that in one sense astronomers know more about the universe than they know about the Solar System. At present, after the fruitful years of Eddington and Jeans, most world interest is centered on the Moon and the planets.

But it is the stars that astronomers probe with spectroscope, telescope, bolometer—and most recently, radio-telescopy.

The radio-telescope picks up minute short-wave signals which all bodies are radiating, but which until recently were unknown. By scanning the sky in the familiar way of the optical telescope and with its aid, astronomers are literally listening to the birth-cries of matter and the death-shrieks of stars.

The wave-lengths sent out by astronomical objects are small but they cover many bands. By suitable interpretation their analysis discloses much about the atomic mechanisms of suns.

Exploring The Sea

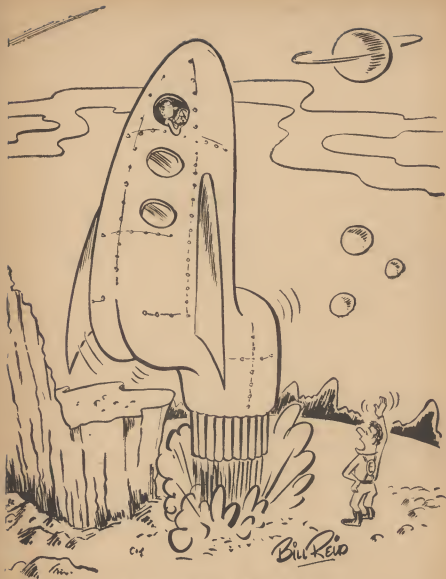
IN SOME respects, Man knows a great deal more about outer space than he knows about the encompassing sea-bottoms. But this temporary state of affairs is about to be changed. In a number of countries including our own, true "deep-sea" submarines are under construction.

Men are as isolated in these ships as if they were in space craft. The heavy walled cylinders will carry atomic propulsion units and will decompose water to provide oxygen. They will be in touch with the surface only through sonic apparatus.

Intensely powerful searchlights with electricity supplied from the atomic power plants, will cover the sea bottom, even in its murkiness, with light sufficient for photography and visual observation.

Biologists generally agree, and engineers are beginning to join them, that the sea is limitless in resources, both edible and mineral. It is only a question of time before technology starts working these fields.

It will be a long time before the need arises to do this, but science is preparing for the inevitable time when the seas will be mined . . .



"A bit to the left . . . ok, set 'er down!"

Space Traveler's Revenge

by

Ivar Jorgensen

Popping a space commander in the eye can bring on a severe punishment—unless, of course, you can show he had it coming—and more besides!

THE CLERK intoned: "The Criminal Court of Mars City is now in session Judge Harmon presiding all who have business here come forward and you will be heard."

Judge Harmon banged down the gavel and presented the clerk with a sour look. How could the man say all that in one breath? Judge Harmon had never figured it out. "What's on the docket?" he growled.

"First case - - - Interplanetary Spaceways, versus one Patrick Hagerty, Terran, your honor."

"What's the charge?"

"Bodily assault upon the person of one Henry Danvers, pilot of the space ship *Star Carrier*, a passenger vessel plying the lanes between Mars and Terra, while said ship was enroute and said Henry Danvers was in pursuit of

his assigned duties."

Judge Harmon scowled. Didn't the man *ever* stop to breathe? "A serious charge.

"Where is the defendant?"

The bailiff nudged a thickset, middle-aged man who got sullenly to his feet and regarded the judge with belligerence.

"The plaintiff? Is he present?"

He was, and he had a large, glowing black eye. A slim, neat young man, he stood up and displayed the shiner to all present. He displayed it proudly as though it were a badge for meritorious conduct.

Judge Harmon, whose indigestion was bothering him again, turned his gaze on Patrick Hagerty. "How do you plead?"

"Huh?"

"Did you or did you not assault the person of the plaintiff?"

"I bust him one in the eye - - - sure. Is that what you meant, Judge?"

"That was roughly what I meant," Judge Harmon replied acidly. "And now - - - can you think of any reason why sentence shouldn't be passed on you immediately?"

The prosecuting attorney glanced triumphantly at the attorney for the defense. The latter raised a quick hand toward Judge Harmon, then thought better of it and lowered the hand. He could see that Old Sourpuss was in a bad mood. And when thus depressed he'd been known to base contempt citations on the color of a man's necktie. Anyhow, this fat Terran was guilty as hell and would get the book thrown at him. A defense was a waste of time.

As the attorney for the defense subsided, Patrick Hagerty answered Judge Harmon's question. "You got no right to pass any sentence on me."

"And why not?" Judge Burke purred.

"The guy had it coming. If ever a guy earned a whack in the glim, it was buster, here, Judge."

The defense attorney stepped forward. "See here now - - -"

Judge Harmon turned baleful eyes. "Shut up." The attorney gulped and subsided. Judge Har-



mon turned back to Patrick Hagerty after a moment of calculation. If he let this slob talk a while before sentencing him, he could adjourn court and go home and see to his indigestion; whereby, if he ended the trial now, the next case could drag out all day. "I'd be interested in hearing just what you consider justification for breaking a very important law; a law based upon the vital premise that a pilot is master of his ship while in space; that at such time his word is law and his person inviolate."

"I socked him in the eye," Patrick Hagerty said doggedly. "He had it coming."

JUDGE HARMON glanced at his watch. "Suppose you tell me just why - - - in your opinion - - - he deserved it."

"Okay, Judge, I'm just an ordinary guy, see? I never been to Mars before."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. Just an ordinary guy back on Terra and I saved my money for a long time so's I could take a trip to Mars on one of these big luxury space liners like it says in the ads."

"You saved your money, most commendable. But I fail to

see - - -"

"I'm getting to it, Judge. You see I save up this money and then go down to get my ticket and the character in the ticket office looks me over like I'm trying to collect money instead of pay it out and he says very snooty: 'How is your health, Mr. Hagerty?'"

"I ask him what's that got to do with it and he tells me their medico will have to look me over and I ask why - - - do I have to be healthy to go to Mars?"

Judge Harmon leaned forward, interested in spite of himself. This man could talk longer and faster than even the clerk. "Your health was not the problem?"

"No, judge. I went to the medico and he weighed me and said I'd have to take off twenty pounds, that only people one-seventy-five or under could go and the underer the better."

"I told him nuts to that stuff. If it was a matter of weight I'd pay extra and he said, no, the Interplanetary Commerce Commission wouldn't allow that so the space line had to keep the weight of their passengers down so they could get enough fares to make the trip worthwhile."

"You complied with his order?"

"Yeah, I did because I wanted to come on a pleasure trip to Mars pretty bad. I knocked off the

weight and then showed up at the blast port one morning with my bag packed and-everything - - - all ready to go."

"I gather, however, that your troubles were not over."

"Not by a long shot. After they check my papers, they put my bag on a scale and weigh it and then open it and dump my things on a table. I let out a yelp and the guy picks up the six handkerchiefs I've brought along and said, 'These will have to be eliminated.'

"I ask how come? He says they're over the weight limit. I ask how in hell am I going to blow my nose. He says that's my problem, on my sleeve maybe, he only works there - - - it's either the hankies or my socks. So I choose the socks figuring I'll take a big blow before I board their damn spaceship."

"Hardly a good public relations attitude I'd say," Judge Harmon observed.

The prosecuting attorney arose nervously and said, "Your Honor, I - - -"

Judge Harmon turned a stern eye in that direction. "Where did you get that necktie?" he asked with deceptive mildness. The lawyer subsided and Judge Harmon said, "Continue, Mr. Hagerty."

"Well we got on the ship and

I figure I'd go right to the lounge and have myself a long cool drink, I'm that annoyed and parched. But the second I'm inside, two real pretty hostesses grab me and hustle me into a kind of horizontal telephone booth and before I know it I'm down on a cot strapped hand and foot by these cuties.

"I yell, hey, what's the idea and the cuties say it's because of blastoff. If you aren't fastened down you get your head torn off. So I say all right because I still want the pleasure of a trip to Mars. They close the door and I lie there and all of a sudden we blast off and I get sicker than a pup from the shock. After a while I'm all right again and get tired of lying there so I let out a yell to get up. Nobody comes. I yell some more. After what seems like all day, one of the girls comes in and says, sorry, they overlooked a couple of the passengers when it come time to let them out of their cages. I grouse a little but she was a nice girl and was sorry so I let it pass."

Judge Harmon looked doubtful. "Is the trip *still* that bad?"

The prosecuting attorney tried to move into the gap. "Your Honor, this man is exaggerating small, inconsequential incidents—"

"Inconsequential!" Hagerty yelled. "I come out hungry as a

horse and ask what's on the menu. The hostess smiles and shows me. Pills it was, Judge. Three pills. A white one, a blue one, and a red one. 'You mean I got a choice?' I croak, real happy, and the cutie smiles and says, yes, that's just part of Interplanetary's fine service."

The prosecuting attorney sprang resolutely to his feet. "Your Honor. Dehydrated and highly condensed foods are an absolute necessity during space flight. The ships have no facilities, storage or otherwise, to handle bulky - - -"

Judge Harmon scowled. "I'm warning you for the last time, sir."

THE ATTORNEY subsided. A man was crazy to practice out here on the frontier, he told himself; out here where judges could act like dictators and flout every refinement of law. A lawyer could always appeal, of course, but who had the time or money to send an appeal to the higher courts back on Terra?

" . . . so living on those damn pills all the way out didn't cheer me up any but I figured I'm out here to enjoy myself and what the hell? So I ask where's a window? I want to look out at the vast grandeur of space like it says in the travel folders.

"She points me to a port and I

go over and look and you know what I see, Judge? Exactly what I'd have seen back on Terra if I'd gone in my closet and closed the door. Nothing. Absolutely nothing but pitch blackness. I yelp, 'Who painted over the damn windows?' and the girl comes back and says I've got to quiet down, that there's only so much oxygen in the ship and they don't want any one passenger getting excited and breathing more than his share."

The prosecuting attorney jumped up and said, "I demand the right to voice rebuttal, your Honor," and then took his life in his hands and plunged right on. "It is an accepted fact that the glories of the universe as referred to in the travel literature is used figuratively. Anyone knows you can see only darkness from the confines of a space ship. Also, the need to conserve oxygen is understood and accepted by everyone familiar with space travel!"

"Very well, sir," Judge Harmon said. "Now that you've refuted, will you be so good as to sit down?"

The attorney subsided into misery and Judge Harmon said "You may proceed, Mr. Hagerty." While the prosecuting attorney wondered: *What's making Old Sourpuss warm up to that illiterate*

slob?

"Well, Judge," Patrick Hagerty said, "there ain't much more to it. One little thing maybe. You can't smoke, you can't breathe, you can't eat, you can't drink, so I figure I'd do a little reading. I managed to smuggle a handsized paperback book aboard with me. Well - - I didn't exactly smuggle it. The thing was in my pocket and they overlooked it."

"I'm sure it was unintentional, Mr. Hagerty. Go on."

"So I start reading and the cutie that's been watching us all during the trip swoops down and lifts the book out of my hands. She says, 'Sorry, but a slight miscalculation in the orbit has necessitated that we get every possible bit of distance out of our fuel. That in turn necessitates eliminating every unnecessary ounce of weight aboard. I'm sure that book weighs at least three ounces.' And she takes it away saying it must be heaved into the jet and burned."

"Nothing's left for me to do but sit still and take shallow breaths and stay happy. Which I do, Judge, not wishing to cause trouble for anybody."

"But the assault on the pilot - - -"

Hagerty sighed. "That came a little while later, when we are coming in toward Mars. This pilot

who is maybe a nice guy for all I know, comes back and makes a little speech to the customers. He looks us over like we should be congratulating him on the fine job he's done and says, 'Ladies and gentlemen - - - you who have been privileged for the first time to enjoy the magnificent freedom of space - - -'

"FREEDOM OF SPACE, he says, Judge. He says that to me - - - a guy who hasn't even been allowed to blow his nose since he got on their lousy tub; a guy who has been told he couldn't even take a deep breath - - - he says that to *me!*"

Hagerty shrugged. "So before I know what I'm doing. I get up and hang one on the guy." Hagerty's shoulders drooped sadly. "I guess that's all."

The prosecuting attorney was on his feet, calmer now, knowing he could rip Hagerty's testimony to bits. "Your Honor, I - - -"

Judge Harmon glowered at him. "The court finds Mr. Hagerty had ample justification for his action. Case dismissed."

"But your Honor - - -"

"And I recommend, sir, that you do not again wear that necktie into this courtroom . . ."

OUTSIDE, Patrick Hagerty faced his own attorney with

obvious bewilderment. "I don't understand it. It doesn't figure. I did what you told me - - - reeled off all that stuff even though it's a fact I got drunk and bopped the pilot while in a state of mental fog, but - - -"

"You did a swell job," the attorney said. "You lied but at the same time all you said was essentially true."

"But how come the judge went for it so heavy?"

"All that stuff was lifted from a letter of protest he sent Interplanetary a long time ago, when he first came out here. He let me read the letter then and I remembered he got no satisfaction from the line. So all the time you were

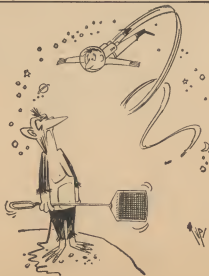
talking, he didn't see you on that ship - - - he was seeing himself. And he was getting even when you told about bopping the pilot."

"Well I'll be damned!"

At that moment there were approaching footsteps. Both men turned to face the angry pilot complete with black eye and doubled fists. Without a word the pilot swung a roundhouse left squarely into Mr. Hagerty's right eye. The effect was highly satisfactory to him. He stepped back, rubbing his knuckles.

"Now, sir," he said politely, "we're even. Suppose you have *me* arrested and we can close the book on this incident."

He turned and walked away.



★ *Ferguson's Folly...?* ★

FERGUSON, the tractor manufacturer in England has just announced a revolutionary development in automobiles which he claims will make obsolete all present cars! Such a pronouncement coming from anyone but a man of his ability—he bested Ford in a long patent battle—would cause cries of derision. But he has to be taken seriously.

He announces that his new car will use a small hydraulic motor attached to each wheel. These motors will be connected through me-

tal tubing to a central pump driven by a gas turbine. This combination is claimed to be remarkably efficient especially since the motors may be used for braking.

The machine sounds similar to the French attempt of a few years back to do the same thing in electric terms. No more has been heard of it though it was a technically sound development.

It is clear that the time is ripe for a radical improvement. Maybe Ferguson isn't just blowing hot air!



"Then they had something called a 'mirror'—horrible looking thing!"



Flight Of The Ark II

by

Alexander Blade

Tragedy gripped Earth when the starship accidentally blasted off into the void without a crew — manned only by its cargo of children!

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

From a magazine feature article explaining the Ark II tragedy of 2016 A. D.:

. . . spaceship aptly christened Ark II. No one has ever been able to put the blame where the blame belonged, and so the mystery of Ark II remains. Something went wrong on that ill-fated night before blastoff—something, we'll never know what. But the tragedy of Ark II is far greater than any other spaceship mishap because it involved the lives of helpless children. As is now known universally, the entire crew of Ark II was composed of children ranging in age from two to four years.

That wasn't the idea, of course. The children were loaded aboard ship on the evening of blastoff minus one. With them went food, hydroponics, all the necessary

supplies for the first really long journey, a dash of ten years duration across the deeps of interstellar space to the planets of Alpha Centauri. The parents of the children — and a hand-picked crew — were to board ship in the morning.

But there was to be no morning.

Some time during the ill-fated night of blastoff minus one, 14 September 2016, Ark II blasted off with its crew of sleeping children.

Theoretically, Ark II was a fully automatic spaceship. That is, the cybernetic equipment in the control room of Ark II was capable of carrying the starship across the vast interstellar gulf without human hands once touching the controls. But it has never been doubted for a moment that the children

aboard Ark II perished somewhere en route. Mankind can only hope that their end was a painless one.

Naturally, pursuit was impossible since Ark II was the only spaceship ever built capable of sustained flight in true interstellar space. And, as everyone knows, Project Interstellar was abandoned after the tragedy of Ark II.

And, from a story which was never written and which will not be known until the Alpha Centauri colony matures and sends its first representatives back to Earth, from a story which occurred in the year 2026, although no one aboard Ark II kept such records . . .

THE SPACESHIP rested on the side of a mountain. It was bitterly cold there and nearby a glacier flowed on its sluggish course down the mountain and through the green valleys below, where the river of ice became a river of water, to the distant sea. The valleys were warm and lush and they had never known the hand of man although now, for the first time, man was near. But much had to happen there on the silent white mountain before man, interstellar man now, came down the slopes and journeyed into the

valleys which had been waiting for him.

The spaceship had come down with force. Almost, it had crashed. The prow was crushed as if a giant metal-shod hand had dealt it a mortal blow. The starboard side was buckled and ripped from prow to atmosphere vanes. One of the atmosphere vanes hung askew and flapped with much clanging against the gleaming metal hull whenever the high mountain wind blew. Outside the ship — which bore the stenciled name *Ark II* on its crumpled prow — there were no signs of life.

Inside the ship . . .

STARBOARD, there were monsters. He knew that. There was simply no doubt. Everybody said that. Not everybody that counted. Everybody. Every human being in creation. The whole world. Everybody said there were monsters to starboard.

Now, somehow, the world had gone haywire. It had suddenly gone *bang*, it had thrown things around, big things the people had never been able to understand. As if they weighed nothing, it had injured several of the people, had broken Raf's arm and twisted Jawji's back and made Frank's nose bleed, and — worst of all — it had

stopped making noise. For, all his life, the world had made the same steady droning, restful noise. Now, abruptly, the noise was gone. There was a kind of keening in its place and — whenever the keening was loudest — a clanging sound. He had liked the other noise better.

And it was cold. It was unbelievably cold. There had never been a cold like this in the history of the world. The cold came from the starboard side of the world, where he knew because everyone knew, that the monster dwelled. The cold came from there, and a freshness in the air too, which he had never smelled before.

His name was Harul and he was leader of the gang. Funny, he thought, referring to them as the gang. They didn't like it. They were the people — that's what people got called in the books they had. People. But weren't they called gang too? He was the leader, wasn't he? Then couldn't he call them what he wanted?

He had come further starboard than any of the people had gone before. As he walked, unlatching the bulkhead doors as he went, he knew that he was growing, had grown. For once before he had come almost this far and the lat-

ches had seemed higher, over his head. That had been a long time ago.

That was funny, about growing. In the books they had on the world, people didn't grow. Children grew. He had never learned to distinguish between people and children, which was why he preferred the word gang. Gang was general; it could mean anything.

People didn't grow. Children were small, and children grew. He had been smaller. The children had been smaller. He was growing. Since he was not outstripping them, not becoming a giant among them, the people were growing too. They either didn't want to notice it or didn't notice it actually. But they had grown although — clearly — they were not children. How could they be children if there were no people bigger than they? On the other hand, how could they be people if there were no children smaller than they?

Both good questions, Harul thought. So I say gang and to heck with it.

But the monsters are different.

There isn't any doubt about the monsters, Harul thought. They live on the starboard side of the world and they look just like the monsters in the books.

Oh, they're not called monsters in the books. The books are subtle, all right. The books actually depicted the monsters as if they were part of the people, working with them and playing with them and sharing the strange, much bigger world in the books with them. But that was foolishness. The monsters actually kept to their own side of the world and the people — the gang, Harul corrected himself — kept to its side.

Were the books mistaken? Because the books showed the long-haired, bare-lower-limbed, slightly-smaller-than-people monsters as friendly and even obscurely beneficial. Harul did not think the books were mistaken. The books were never mistaken. Harul thought the books were being sophisticated about it. It was a complex idea: The books said people and monsters lived together but people and monsters did not live together. Therefore, people and monsters were not friendly.

They were enemies.

Besides, there had been contacts, Harul thought, between the gang and the monsters. They were fearful memories: they had always resulted in violence, in blackened eyes and twisted limbs and bruised bodies on both sides.

Harul shuddered. Now for the first time actively, one of the people was actually seeking the monsters.

Harul was seeking them.

THE *bang* had come from starboard, from the monsters, stopping the familiar life-long noise, twisting the machinery, injuring the people. So had the bleak cold wind. Harul thought the monsters knew about it. Harul thought the monsters had planned it; the monsters were subtle. No, that wasn't the word. There were subtitles in the books, all right. Subtle, that was it. Subtly, the monsters had planned everything. The monsters had made war on the people only sporadically during Harul's lifetime. Now, it was an all-out attack.

Harul had to find a monster and confirm this. He did not like the idea, but could see no other way out.

And he was afraid.

Walking softly, carefully, as if he might break the surface on which he tread, Harul advanced to another between-bulkheads door, and opened it. There had been a kind of weather-stripping on all the doors once, but long ago Harul and the people had strip-

ped it off the doors on their side of the world. Evidently the monsters had done the same thing on their side. As a result, cold wind shrieked through the cracks.

The wind really blew in earnest when Harul opened the next door. It was also incredibly, numbingly cold.

Harul gaped.

Ahead of him, seen for the first time, inexplicable, frightening, was the edge of the world.

Not the rounded, curving-back-upon-itself edge he had always known. Something jagged, instead. Something bent and buckled. And a gaping hole. A hole through which the bitter winds came.

For a long time Harul could bring himself no closer to the hole. It was of monster manufacture, of course. The monsters and their war. It was more important than ever that he find a monster

But he could bring himself no closer to the jagged hole at the edge of the world.

Until a monster came up behind him.

THE FIRST thing Harul became aware of, something jabbed against his back. It was something with a sharp point and

it jabbed hard and it hurt. Harul lunged toward the hole at the edge of the world, but the weapon against his back moved with him and a voice cried:

"Stop, monster! I have you. I'll kill you if you try to get away."

Harul was amazed to hear the monster speak. That was one thing he hadn't thought of, the monster speaking. But the monster had called him monster — and that didn't make sense.

He turned his head slowly, in order to see the monster who held him at bay. The voice said:

"No sudden movements!"

The monster was shivering with cold, as Harul was. Odd. He hadn't thought a monster would grow cold, as people did. Up close and seen in the flesh for the first time except in the hurried fights and raids, the monster was not horrible to look upon. Harul almost found looking upon it pleasant — until he remembered the weapon jammed against his back.

"What do you want?" Harul asked.

"You know what we want, monster. This cold blowing air and this — this hole in the world — you monsters are responsible. Well, aren't you? You want the

whole world for yourselves, isn't that it. Portside isn't enough, not any more." Somehow, Harul got the impression that the monster was frightened. He could not imagine what the monster was frightened of until he realized quite suddenly that the monster was frightened of him. He began to smile, but the weapon — a sharpened length of metal strut, he saw — was jabbed against him harder.

"No trick," the monster said. "Just stand still."

"Monster," Harul said.

"You mean me?"

"Why do you call *me* monster?"

"I was thinking the same . . . it's a trick! Now, turn around that way. Turn around and start marching."

Harul turned slowly. He was not going with the monster if he could help it. Because the monster would take him to starboard, where the other monsters were and he could not let that happen.

Abruptly, Harul lunged to one side and struck out with his right arm. The forearm caught the monster's own right hand like a club, and the monster's weapon flew magically from its fingers. Harul watched it sail in a quick gleaming arc through the air and

toward the jagged hole at the edge of the world and then through it. There it struck against something and bounced and rolled down a rough expanse of jumbled gray shards and finally came to rest, end upright, in a field — a sloping field — all of white.

Then something was on Harul's back, clawing at his face and trying to floor him. The monster was strong and fought with fury and desperation, but Harul was amazed to find he was very much stronger. He had taken the strength of monsters as something proverbial, but he had no trouble forcing the monster off his back, pinning the monster to the floor and —

Amazingly, the monster began to cry. It was the last thing Harul had expected a monster would do, and he got up immediately.

"Monster, m-monster!" the floored creature said.

"All right, get up," Harul told it. "*You're coming back with me.*"

"You can't make me," the monster said.

"I'll hurt you again —" Harul threatened, then stopped. He looked down at the monster. He could not hurt it. He did not know why but knew he would not fight with the monster again.

"Get up."

The monster got up, brushing itself off. The monster, Harul observed carefully now, was shaped much like a man except that the monster was slimmer, less bulky. The monster was very pleasant to look at.

"I — I'm going out there to get my knife," the monster said.

"You're coming with me." But even to Harul it did not sound very convincing.

"No. Don't try to stop me."

"But even if I didn't take you, you couldn't go out there!"

"I want my knife," the monster persisted.

"Come on. You're coming back with me."

But it was as if the monster sensed that Harul could no longer hurt it, for a reason neither Harul nor the monster understood. Turning its back, the monster looked at the jagged hole in the side of the world, then peered anxiously through it into the face of the cold keening wind, then looked back still more anxiously at Harul, then took a deep breath of the clear cold air, shuddered slightly, and climbed through the hole in the world.

Almost, Harul could not believe his eyes. He doubted if he would have had the courage to go

out there. And this despite the fact that he had proven himself stronger than the monster.

A FRAID but more curious than he had ever been in his life, Harul went to the jagged hole in the edge of the world and got his hand on the cold, rough metal. And peered — outside.

The monster was making its way across the sloping field of shards, toward the other sloping field, the dazzlingly white one in which the weapon had come to rest upright. The wind blew against Harul's face while he watched, making him squint. He expected catastrophe momentarily and did not know where it would come from. He watched the monster edge out onto the field of white

Something else came all at once into his field of vision.

He had read of such things but had never seen them.

There were none in all the world.

Ani —

Animals!

It was a large animal with a shaggy white coat and it walked on all four legs, a shuffling but deathly quiet kind of walk, and it had a large snout which Harul knew would contain wicked teeth.

It was larger than the monster whom Harul had bested, and larger than Harul too.

And the monster outside did not know the animal was there.

"Hey!" Harul called a warning. At first he did not know quite why he called. The monster whirled to face him—its nice-to-look-at face frozen in a look of horror when it saw the animal.

The animal made a hideous noise and lumbered on, faster now, with no need for quiet.

The good-looking monster stood transfixed, not half a dozen strides from the weapon it was seeking.

It was very cold out there, Harul knew. It was dangerous. It was not warm and snug, as the world had been before its accident.

It was frightening.

But the monster needed him.

Monster? So what if the monster needed him? When the animal struck, it would mean one monster less—

Time seemed suspended for Harul. Through his mind in swift succession ran pictures from the books he had read. There were many, many books in the world. They did not speak of monsters as monsters. They spoke of them as women—or as girls. Because somehow, Harul thought now, it was proper to consider himself not a

man (or a person) and not a child, but something intermediary, a boy. And it was proper to consider the monsters they had always feared not as monsters, not as women (female persons, whatever a female was) but as girls. It came to Harul like a flash of inspiration—and that wasn't all.

He had defeated the monster—the girl. It had been easy. He was the stronger.

But he had not been able to finish her off.

It was wrong for him to finish her off.

To hurt her.

A new feeling welled up within him, forcing every other feeling from his being. He had never experienced it before.

A feeling of protection.

He felt somehow — oddly — responsible for the girl's well-being. He had to help her. He had to go out there and protect her. It seemed now the most natural thing in the world. He was amazed that no one ever thought of it before.

The animal was very close to her, roaring and rearing up for a moment clumsily on its hind legs. It was even bigger than Harul thought.

The girl screamed and screamed. Then, finally, she began to run and so gained a few seconds reprieve.

Harul leaped through the jagged hole in the edge of the world, aware of the intense cold, of the need for haste

He plunged into the dazzling field of white. It was numbingly cold. He plucked the long metal strut from it. The strut was half as long as Harul's arm. It looked as if it had come from a piece of machinery aboard the world and had been sharpened against a rough, hard surface into a weapon. Harul hefted it and whirled.

THE ANIMAL had cornered the girl on a ledge of rock beyond the dazzling white field. It seemed in no great hurry now. It seemed almost to be relishing the fruits of its chase

Then suddenly it reached up and swatted at air with its forepaws. The girl moved back, dumb with fear. The animal swatted again, closer.

Harul bellowed as he charged.

He hit the animal on the dead run before it could swat for the girl a third time. He landed on its back and as it roared fearfully and went charging again across the field of dazzling white, he raised the metal strut weapon and brought it down with all his strength below the left shoulder. He felt it go in slowly, through muscle, and

then grate between bones, and then his hand rested on the animal's shaggy hide.

The wounded animal stood upright on its hind legs and tried to throw Harul. But he clung grimly, using his legs, wrapping them as far around the muscular body as they would go. Then he withdrew the long knife and it came away red and even as the animal lay down suddenly in the field of white, trying to roll over on Harul and crush him, he plunged the knife in again.

They rolled over in the field of white and it was soft and very cold. The animal staggered to its feet again, roaring horribly. Harul withdrew the knife and plunged it into the animal's red-streaming side a third time and this time the animal rolled over on its side and a noise rattled in its throat and then Harul felt the great body beneath him go limp.

He got up groggily and went to the girl. She had watched everything. She was coming down from the rock now, smiling shyly. She was no longer afraid—of the dead animal or of Harul.

"This is a grim and cold place," Harul said, "with real monsters in it—" and he pointed at the dead beast.

"You saved my life!"

"I am called Harul," he said.

"Jeen. My name is Jeen."

"Jeen. Jeen, listen. If the world is—is wounded or dead now, and if we . . . somehow, have reached this different and vastly bigger world, why . . . why then is it a cold place full of horrors?"

"Harul, Harul," she murmured, and took his hand. He followed her, liking the feel of her hand nestled in his bigger one. "From the top of the rock," she said, "I could see a long way. I could see—but come."

They climbed the rock together. And, together, gazed down on the balmy green valley at the foot of the mountain.

It was very beautiful. It was—how shall I say, thought Harul?

It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life—lushly green and warm and even up here you could get its scent in your nostrils, heady and fresh and living.

And dimly there was the sound of rushing water and Harul knew, somehow, the wind would not be blowing so fiercely down there.

"We must tell the others," Jeen said.

They walked back toward the world. The ship. Back past the dead animal. "Harul?" Jeen asked and he nodded.

"Even—even after we tell the others, Harul, and explain to them how we are girls and you are boys and none of us monsters—even after that, Harul, after all that, and after we lead them back out here and down into the green place . . ." She was blushing.

"Yes?" Harul said.

"Harul. Oh, Harul! Even after all that, can we still be special friends. You and me?"

Instead of answering, Harul squeezed her hand. Then, together, they went back inside the ship.

The long journey was over.



Moon Dust



IT may seem a little too early to worry about the surface of the Moon—after all the first satellite station has not yet been built—but that is just what astronomers *are* worried about.

Some years back, three or four, it was announced that very likely the surface of the Moon was not

the hard firm place that scientists had thought it to be. The theory was advanced, on the basis of considerable observation, that actually the surface was probably covered with a layer several inches deep of pumice.

This theory stated that the fierce heating and cooling of the sur-

face would produce a pulverizing effect on the surface, and that undoubtedly many minute light changes that were seen through powerful telescopes could be accounted for on this basis.

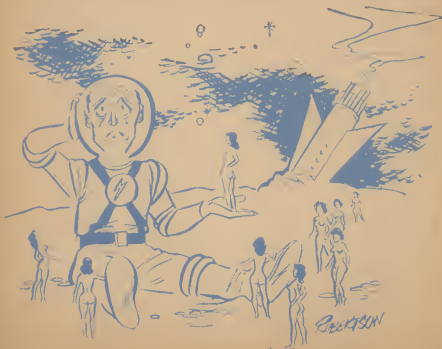
But an even more disturbing report has been made. The suspicion now is that the so-called "seas" are actually former lava beds which have disintegrated to powder under the heating and cooling—and *they may be hundreds of feet deep!*

If this is true, a completely new and most difficult problem is introduced into the astronautical picture. How will it be possible for a future rocket to land on such a

surface? The answer is of course, that it cannot. What will be necessary is some dust detecting device so that the rocket can avoid the dust.

This new and difficult dimension of rocketry, while of no immediate concern, will eventually have to be considered. The assumption always has been that a landing rocket will do so on a plain, just like a landing field.

It is difficult enough to land any sort of a rocket—in fact the techniques have not been worked out. How much more difficult does this apparent discovery make the operation!



All the time Jason worked in the machine shop he wondered about his origin. Finally he decided to ask, and that led to a meeting of —

Jason And The Maker

by

Paul W. Fairman

JASON'S abnormality did not come overnight. It began as a strange weariness; a reluctance to report for work at the grinding machine in Plant Five of the International Extrusions Corporation. But Jason reported, of course. The habit pattern was too fixed and definite to allow even tardiness.

But all that day, the feeling of unrest greatedened in Jason's ponderings. Until suddenly it could be no longer ignored. Jason snapped the off switch on the grinder, stepped into the aisle, and stood quietly waiting.

Almost immediately the foreman looked up from the paper work at his desk. He saw Jason. He frowned. He got up and hurried forward.

"What's wrong with your machine, Jason?"

"Nothing."

"But you turned it off."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I want to meet my Maker."

The foreman's jaw dropped.
"You want to — *what?*"

"I want to meet my Maker."

There were many questions the foreman could have asked, but the demand was so extraordinary as to put him beyond his depth. And, being a small man so confronted, his first instinct was to run for help.

This he did, hurrying toward the glass cubicle at the far end of the shop. There he found the Shop Superintendent. He pointed down the aisle. "Jason — Five-Seven-Nine-Four-Three. I went down to see what was wrong and — well, I never heard anything like it!"

"Like what?"

"The reason for the stoppage.

Jason said, 'I want to meet my Maker.' Can you imagine?"

The Shop Superintendent's jaw dropped. "That sounds like —why, it sounds like a threat of *suicide!*"

They stared at each other as they pondered the utter implausibility of the thing. Then the Shop Super, being also a small man, said, "Wait here. I'll buzz the Plant Manager for instructions."

He went into the cubicle and got on the phone. The foreman waited outside. He watched the Super's lips move and wondered what was being said behind the closed door.

After a few minutes the Super emerged. And if he had been amazed upon entering, he was positively astounded upon emerging. "It's all right," he said.

"What's all right?"

"What Jason wants. They are going to grant his request."

"But they must have misunderstood you!"

The Super was ruffled. "I make a habit of speaking quite clearly. Take Five-Seven-Nine-Four-Three up to *Personnel*."

Jason was escorted to an elevator and lifted five floors and ushered into a long, shining corridor of stainless steel. After a long walk, the guide stopped before a door upon which was stenciled a single name — an almost sacred name within the precincts of the Arthur Wilson Tate International

Extrusions Corporation.

The guide pointed. "In there."

Jason said, "Thank you." He opened the door and entered. He closed the door. The guide, a baffled look upon his face, moved slowly back down the corridor . . .

ARTHUR Wilson Tate, a very old man with white hair and bright blue eyes, sat behind a huge metal desk. His fragile hands were blue-veined. His face was seamed and he gave little indication, physically, of the vast knowledge and experience that lay behind his broad forehead. When he looked up at Jason, his face shed a look of weariness and his eyes were bright with interest. "Yes?"

"I asked to meet my Maker. They sent me here."

"I am your maker."

"You?"

Tate smiled. "You are one of our latest model industrial robots. Series B-Twelve. You were constructed for a work-span of twenty-four years and have a Quotient Six brain on the Comprehension Scale."

Jason stared at Tate; stared without word or movement for a long time. Then the robot dropped to his knees and a brightness appeared in his neon eyes. "My maker!"

Tate got up and rounded his desk and in his face there was a

mixture of cold scientific interest and a kind of personal compassion. He said, "Your production quota will suffer if you stay away from your grinder too long."

Jason arose and turned stiffly toward the door. He opened it and as he went out Tate heard his words: "I have met my Maker." And somehow, they did not sound as scratchy and unhuman as a robot's broadcasting mechanism would cause them to sound . . .

A few moments later, Tate's assistant, a bright young engineering graduate entered the office. "What do you make of it, sir?" he asked.

Tate was still staring at the door. "I don't know. Frankly, I just don't know. Metal fatigue? An accidental fusion of wires?"

"Have you ever seen a case of such definite deviation before?"

"Never. We'll have to take that

robot apart. Maybe we'll learn something."

"But we know exactly what we put into them."

Tate went back and sat down behind his desk. "Do we?" His eyes grew vague.

"I could get out the plans —the prints. We could check them for bugs," the assistant said.

"Never mind. It's late. I'm tired. I'm going home."

The assistant turned to leave. "Goodnight, sir."

"Good night."

Tate went to the roof and got into his copter and lifted up and over the city. He lay back against the soft cushion and closed his eyes. And strange thoughts were going through his tired mind. *I'd like to meet my Maker, too*, he told himself suddenly. He smiled vaguely. *I wonder if He knows exactly what he put into me?*

THE END



Meteor Origins



SINCE the sky is continually bombarded by meteoric particles and showers, it is only natural to speculate on their origin. Astronomers have finally come to certain definite conclusions regarding meteors. Meteors are essentially broken-up comets!

Comets are very fragile struc-

tures, from a gravitational standpoint. They are held together by feeble gravitational forces. Small particles of the cometary heads are easily torn away from the comet by mere proximity to planets. The result is that planets are constantly being struck by these individual particles, which evidence

themselves in our atmosphere by burning up and streaking the sky.

Meteoric showers, the most spectacular aspect of meteor bombardment, seems to be due to the Earth sweeping through the elongated tail of a comet. Here, hundreds and thousands of particles plunge at once into our atmosphere creating an exciting and colorful effect. Comets are unquestionably the major source then, astronomers conclude, of meteoric matter.

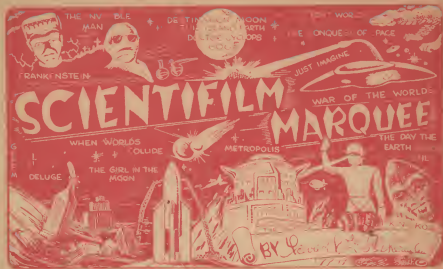
Of course this does not exclude the existence of other sources, perhaps long-gone planetary debris, or perhaps the remnants of a shattered satellite. Maybe even the Asteroid

Belt contributes in some way to the meteoric bombardment of our planet.

It is a fortunate thing that meteors have gone through a sort of cosmic grindstone and are consequently mostly small; it is well too, that our atmosphere is thick and dense. Were it not for these two natural protections or defenses, the surface of the Earth might be as pitted as the Moon's. Fortunately too, space is so large in volume that rockets of the future won't have much chance of encountering meteoric junk. Meteors travel with such high speeds they'd be able to hole any metal object in space.



"Sit down, Dolan! You're making a spectacle of yourself!"



HOTTER THAN HOT! Newer than new! Those may be lyrics from "The Varsity Rag" but they also aptly describe the situation here at Scientifilm Center. Hellzapoppin, with special effects footage being shot on the space-time spectacle *Hell in the Heavens*, and every time I answer the phone some title being mentioned to me that's music to my ears. Yours too, I'm sure. How would you like to see *THE TIME MACHINE*? Wilson Tucker's *MAN FROM TOMORROW* (which maybe you read as *Wild Talent*)? A real old-fashioned super-science shocker from the pages of *Weird Tales*, as only Edmond Hamilton could do 'em, brought up to date by a screenscripiter like say Frank Quattrocchi and directed by Tom Gries who did *Donovan's Brain*? How about the creator of "Dono-

van's Brain" himself, Curt Siodmak, developing an original idea by Chas Beaumont, *The Man Who Could Not Die*? And ever consider what a great movie "Death's Deputy", by L. Ron Hubbard, would make? Chas Nuetzel has, and is doing a cinemadaptation.

Yes, all the foregoing - - and more - - are distinct possibilities as forthcoming films in the fantasy genre. Editor Hamling SOS'ed me to have my copy in *yesterday* and I'm only composing it one day *after* its Chicago deadline but this will give you the freshest of possible Hollywood datelines. For instance, it was just before lunch that a producer left my office, steered in the direction of Jerome (sixty stories) Bixby, leaving with me the incidental intelligence that Fletcher Pratt's *Project Excelsior* (nee "Asylum Satellite") has been

bought for filming.

This morning I was awakened by a phone call from Sol Lesser's organization, my assistance being sought for establishing contact with fandom's own favored son, Wilson (Bob) Tucker. The potential picture property, MAN FROM TOMORROW, the suspense-filled novel of the wild-talented Paul Breen, the man with the mutated mind. You read it as the original hard cover from Rinehart, or in its Science Fiction Book Club edition, or in the currently available pocketbook from Bantam, or even perhaps as serialized in England. In any event, if you haven't read it in one of its four appearances to date, its film version should be a treat.

Turning back the clock a quarter of a century, Tom Gries has uncovered a "treasure in the dust" (as Geo Pal first expressed it) in "Pigmy Island" by Edmond Hamilton. A strong possibility exists for this fast-paced scientale of tiny men and giant menaces to be produced in England as a companion feature for *X, the Unknown*. By the way, word from Walter Willis is that *The Quartermass Experiment* is the best British scientifilm since THINGS TO COME. It was adapted from a highly successful teleplay of the same name, so well received in fact that it has had an equally fine sequel vidicast called *Quartermass II*. It is hoped that a movie sequel will eventuate. The American releasing title of *Quartermass* is *SHOCK!*

Into each life some pain must fall, and followers of this department believing me to have a natural bent for enthusing about each and

every scientifilm no matter how insignificant or enervating, must now prepare themselves for a shock. I did *not* like FORBIDDEN PLANET. I was *almost* as disappointed in it as CONQUEST OF SPACE.

Review: In 1922 the Czech science-fictioneer Karel Capek introduced the word "robot" into the English language via his famous stageplay "R.U.R.", and thereby indebted to him for a living such men as Isaac Asimov, Jack Williamson, Eando Binder, Edmond Hamilton and Ray Cummings. Capek being dead and unable to defend himself, these men should honor his memory by forming a Society for the Protection From Cruelty of Robots, and March on MGM! Among the verboten things on the Forbidden Planet (Altair-4, in case you're ever tempted to vacation there) should have been the "comic" relief (when do we get a relief from such comics?) of Robby-the-Robot.

To continue: In the million simoleon spacial special, (three million dollars and three years in the making is what I believe the official release says) a nubile 19-year-old-virgin, diaphanously decored Anne Francis, meets in heart-on collision with a saucerful of ultramarines of the 23d century who've had nothing headier for long long lightyears than an occasional dip from the Milky Whey. Granted this promising premise - - a delectable scientist's daughter, who knows practically nothing (and nothing practical) about the birds and the bees, vs. the Earth-wolves who itch to establish a friendly niche with

said biologically naive native of this extra-solar planet - - we should be in for a farce-rate futuristiccomedy. Instead, however, of a satirical 100 minute romp 'neath double moons in a chartreuse sky, **FORBIDDEN PLANET** is a pedestrian paced poop-out.

Three hundred years from now the slogan may be "Join the Space Marines and See the Worlds", but let's hope for the sake of the crimson-corpuscle young rogerbucko's of 2200 AD that their adventures are not as dull dull dull as this one. As I saw it at the super-sneak, it was all yak and almost yukless. Luckless scientifiasco's biggest (intentional) laugh was generated when Robby (ugh) the Robot, that humanoid abortion from Karel Capek's kitchen sink, gave forth with a Brobdignagian burp while internally analyzing some whiskey. But chiefest danger the chief young protagonist is in thruout the body of the film is of being talked or travelogged to death by speechifying philologist Walter Pidgeon.

Only as we approach the brain of the planet does interest quicken. Then, for the sci-fi eye - - *ecstasy!* Not since the classics, **METROPOLIS** and **THINGS TO COME**, such opulent architecture, such magnificent mind-shattering machinery: 20 square miles of living mechanism, functioning on a million years after the super-race that created it has passed away.

Plotwise: the story is as tenuous as the vacuum of outer space. But toward the end, when the cinemagicians of Disney's wave their wands of animation and bring to life a typical Lindsay-Finlay mon-

ster, the result is awesome. It's a fantasia in phosphorescents. Film's finale fizzles, but in the penultimate moments, there are several sequences calculated to cure a bald man's butch. Considering its fantastic Freudian climax, **FORBIDDEN PLANET** might well be subtitled . . . *ID Came from Inner Space*.

Postmortem: the "electronic tonalities" of Bebe & Louis Barran are a bright innovation lending an alien atmosphere to the production, and the technicians have triumphed Oscarfully in the visual department. Inside sources inform me the Studio is doing a drastic scissor job after studying the complaints on the preview cards. About all I can say is, the more MGM discards, the better picture it will have. And that makes me damned unhappy, because I'd like to see Leo, with his stars and resources, matching Universal scientifiilm for scientifiilm. Why, they could put Pier Angelli in **THE WORLD BELOW!** Give **FINAL BLACKOUT** the stature of *Battleground*. Bring Bradbury to the screen in a big way. Film **SLAN!**

AT **UNIVERSAL** the production schedule includes Curt Siodmak's *The Man Who Could Not Die*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* by Richard Matheson, and more from Wm Alland including *The Deadly Mantis*, *The Land Unknown*, *The Mole People* and *Monolith*. There is a possibility of *The Naked World* (nee *The Great Green Og*) being reactivated from extra footage available from **THIS ISLAND EARTH**.

Redd Boggs postcards me: "I understand some popular composer or other is writing a song name of 'Martians, Go Home!' for a movie cartoon. Does this mean that they're making Fred Brown's marvelous yarn into a movie cartoon?" Frankly, Redd, I don't know. Do you, Fred? If so, come out wherever you are and communicate with this column: your fans and I await the word.

The Day the Sun Grew Cold has been scripted by Frank Melford . . . *It Conquered the Earth*, from an original idea by Jim Nicholson and Paul Blaisdell, will utilize the monster-making talents of artist Blaisdell (last seen as the 3-eyed mutant in *The Day the World Ended*) to create and activate a giant bodiless brain . . . Roger Corman, for whom Paul Blaisdell created *The Beast with 1,000,000 Eyes*, has purchased an original sci-fi screenplay, *Not of This Earth* . . . Lucas Productions has purchased "The Vanished!" from English author Roger Banton . . . *Envoy Earth* has been scripted by Ken Darling . . . Edmund Gwenn will

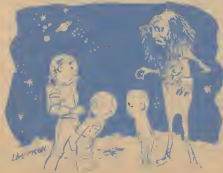
star in *The Green Man* . . . Other titles announced for filming include *The Girl from Beneath the Sea*, *The Weapon*, *The Volunteer*, *This Island*, *Creature from Green Hell*, *The Werewolf*, *The Floaters*, *Windblast*, *The Tree Men*, *The She Creature*, *They Lived a Million Years*.

Screen treatments and screenplays in search of producers include "The Earthquake People" (Jerome Bixby), "Barrier to the Stars" (Milt Luban & Ken Crossen), "Master of Death" (R. DeWitt Miller & Anna Hunger), "The Earth-Watchers" (Gordon Dewey & Simon Matrii), "The Fishermen from Space" (Kris Neville & Bill Cox), "Tomorrow Unknown" by S. J. Byrne and "Secret Fires" by Wm Wayne Wallace.

Ib Melchior's "The Sleeper" has excited Hollywood interest.

THE BLACK SLEEP, melodrama of a mad neural surgeon (Basil Rathbone), boasts one of the biggest horror casts of all time, zombies including Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, Akim Tamiroff and Lon Chaney Jr.

— Forrest J. Ackerman



"My daddy can lick your daddy!"

Letters from the Readers

SAUCER PARADOX

Dear Mr. Hamling:

It's been a long time since I've written a letter to *Madge*—and I've never written one to *Tales*—so it looks like I'll have to start making up for lost time.

As I passed the newsstand last Saturday on my way home from the library, I chanced to see a copy of the May *TALES* which I forthwith bought. I might add here that while your companion magazine, *IMAGINATION* is my favorite science fiction magazine, I like *TALES* too.

The highlight of the May issue, I think, is where you say in your editorial that, "... flying saucer books are written and published for only one reason; to make the author and the publisher a little bit of the long green..." and then you turn right around and run an ad for a saucer book. Which brings up another question, just who is this Orfeo Angelucci? Somebody spelled backwards?

Let's have more work by Darius John Granger, Paul W. Fairman, Geoff St. Reynard, and Dwight V. Swain. They write the type of science fiction I like. (I can just hear all those sophisticated *mature* readers of *Galaxy* and *Astounding* saying that my tastes are immature and juvenile. Well, perhaps they are, but that's what I like to read!) I prefer the vintage stuff—as from the late thirties and early forties, before all this passion for sociological, psychological, etc. science fiction set in.

Janice Jacobson
2430 Garth Ave.

Los Angeles 34, Calif.

Let's face it, Janice, people like to read about flying saucers, so why shouldn't we advertise the Angelucci book? Who is Orfeo? Darned if we know. Just somebody who claims to have had personal contact with the saucerites. True or not, this book—like others of its kind—makes good fiction reading! ... On your last point, you've got a lot of company. We've contended for quite a

spell that there's been too much of this sociological-neurotic junk masquerading as science fiction. Give us (and you) a fast-paced adventure of the starways anyway. Everyday, for that matter! wlh

REAL ACTION

Dear Bill Hamling:

Just got the May issue of TALES, and was it good! GATEWAY TO INFINITY I consider to be one of your finest feature stories. In addition to Granger, let's have more of Dwight Swain's stories (like his TERROR STATION in the September '55 issue) and Geoff St. Reynard's COSMIC BUNG-LEERS (in the January '56 number). These I consider real action stories!

Back to the May issue. THE FINAL QUARRY was good and packed with suspense; NO CAUSE FOR ALARM left me with no cause for joy. A TOWN FOR MR. SNTZL and IT FELL FROM THE SKY were surprising in their endings; THE CASE OF THE STRIPPED BLONDE was also good—especially the blonde! INTRUDER FROM THE VOID was startling in that it presented—to me—a new theme. More like it!

Let me compliment your magazine as being one of the best; it is sometimes higher, sometimes lower in its standards—which fact I attribute to the editor's trying to give us a really good book.

Larry Carroll
Gen. Del.

Goodrich, Texas

Plenty of real action stories awaiting you in future issues, Larry. wlh

SUBSCRIPTION COMING

Dear Bill:

The May issue of TALES was superb; I think it was even better than the April issue of your companion magazine *Imagination*. Seems to me your two magazines are improving with each issue so much that in a few months I think they'll be the two top science fiction books in the field.

Best in the May TALES was Darius John Granger's GATEWAY TO INFINITY. I haven't read a tale like that for too long a time!

Next was THE FINAL QUARRY by Adam Chase. I have never heard of the author before but will be looking for him from now on.

The rest of the story lineup followed: THE CASE OF THE STRIPPED BLONDE ranking right along with "QUARRY"; INTRUDER FROM THE VOID, NO CAUSE FOR ALARM, A TOWN FOR MR. SNTZL, and IT FELL FROM THE SKY.

If the next issue is as good I'll send in my subscription!

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Ave.
Bronx 56, N. Y.

Now that you've read the next issue, Marty, we'll be looking for that subscription! . . . We'd like to have everyone take advantage of the great subscription offer on page 130; we don't have to tell you that the free book bonus is a good deal—matter of fact, we think it's slightly terrific! So shoot in a few dollars for your choice—today. . . wlh

NEXT BATTER

Dear WLH:

Three strikes is out in baseball. Ivar Jorgensen has appeared three times in *Madge* and *Tales*. Need I say more?

But then into the other part of TALES—the part I like. GATEWAY TO INFINITY in the May issue was darned good. This Granger guy can write well enough to fill the issues when you don't feature St. Reynard or Swain. And believe me, that's a compliment!

Since I'm on the subject, now that you've got Edmond Hamilton to write for you, how about getting Leigh Brackett? It may sound impossible, but she's even better than Ed!

The artwork. Ah yes—the artwork. I do not understand. I cannot comprehend how in infinity you manage to put a wonderful cover like Rognan's on the front, and then clutter up the interior with Terry's botched up “one-dimensionals” and Freas' smeared mess-terpieces!

I got a kick out of the letter by Madfan A. Moore, though. He's funny, but he's also wrong. Swain's stories are good reading.

Jeremy Millett
1446 Garden St.
Park Ridge, Ill.

What's with the big gripe on Jorgensen? The lad writes a fine yarn. And aren't you being a bit hard on Terry and Freas? Huh? . . . We'd welcome a yarn by Leigh Brackett—how about it, Leigh? Those comments by reader Moore last issue sound funny because the excerpts he quoted were taken out of context with the story as a whole. You can do the same thing with most any yarn—even the classics! Try it sometime with

ALIENS, ANYONE?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been reading and enjoying IMAGINATIVE TALES (and *Madge*) for over a year now, and I thought it was about time I let you know about it. After all, there are only two ways an editor can know whether or not his mag is a success. The sales chart and the readers' reactions to the stories. So here's my reaction.

I sincerely believe that your two magazines are the best in the field today. I think that you as an editor (along with Ray Palmer) show you have a real concern for science fiction and its fans. With this type of an attitude you may make mistakes but in the long run you'll be successful.

I particularly like the features and cartoons in TALES. And speaking of the features, I believe your editorial in the May issue and Stan Fine's cartoon in the same issue have a direct bearing on each other. What if some alien intelligence was testing us by letting its presence be known? Observing our reactions would be a good way to determine our cultural level. And also let us know we're not the only intelligent beings in the universe!

Scott B. Lilly
1455 Harvard Blvd.
Toledo 14, Ohio

If the flying saucers are indeed extra-terrestrial visitors—and we think so—then we already have alien contact even though not on a personal face-to-face basis. Wish our visitors would finally drop down to say hello! with

APPROVAL NOTED

Dear Mr. Hamling:

To show my approval of the great improvement in TALES, I am sending in my subscription. Have been a subscriber to *Imagination* for several years and I now feel that TALES is equally as good!

I especially like such things as interior color, cartoons, and the letter column. While your covers are usually excellent, I must say the one for the March issue was about the worst you've had.

Can't quite agree that the action story is what most readers want, but even so I may be wrong as they are well worth reading!

Stephen I. Harriman
Ferry Road
Saco, Maine

The cover on the March issue was what is known as a BEM (Bug-Eyed-Monster) cover. We throw one into the schedule occasionally as a change of pace. Frankly, they sort of remind us of the Edgar Rice Burroughs era, and that was (still is) a mighty entertaining period of science fiction wlh

INTEREST REVIVED

Dear Bill Hamling:

This letter is to let you know how much I enjoy *Imaginative Tales*. I've read most types of science fiction, and frankly I was ready to junk my interest when last November I came across your magazine. I was pleasantly surprised to say the least for I had been missing something!

Since that time I've been comparing each new issue to hit the stands and I really feel that each one gets better. Keep giving us lead novels like ENEMY OF THE QUA and THE COSMIC BUNGLERS. Count me as one who is back in the fold!

Bill Desmond
787 E. Fourth St.
South Boston 27, Mass.

Your renewed interest in science fiction is quite typical of thousands of others, Bill. Our readership has grown tremendously with both Madge and Tales; we intend to make it grow a lot more—with the best science fiction reading available! wlh

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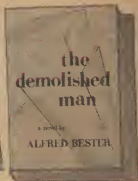
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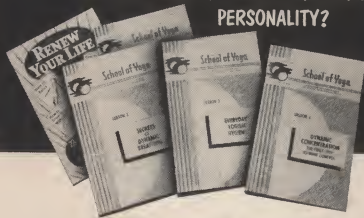
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